

BUFFALO BILL'S GREAT ACHIEVEMENT!

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November 18, 1891.

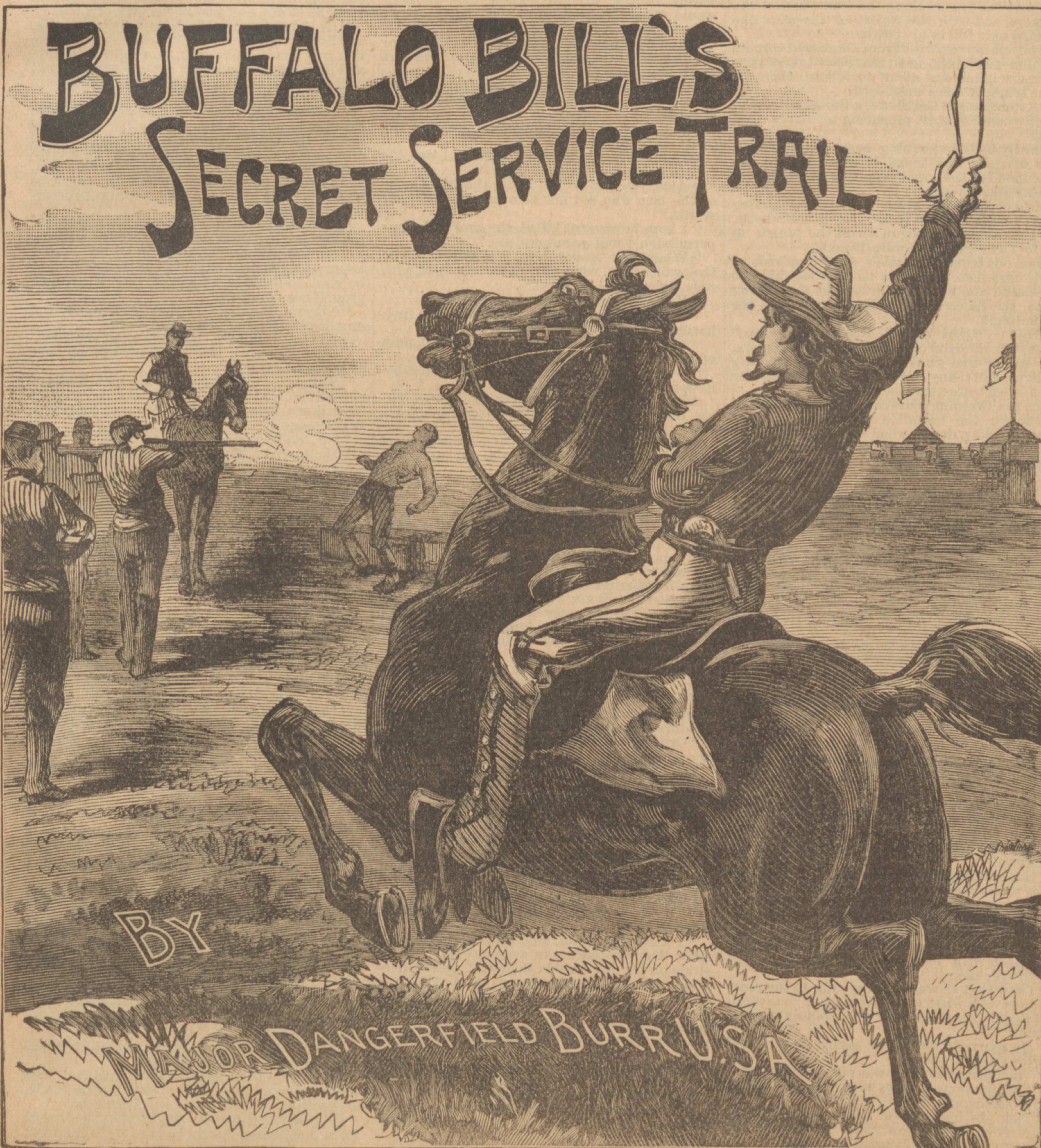
No. 682.

Published Every  
Wednesday.

*Beadle & Adams, Publishers,*  
93 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.  
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LIII.



"HOLD! I HAVE THAT MAN'S PARDON!" CRIED BUFFALO BILL, THE COURIER.



# Buffalo Bill's Secret Service Trail;

OR,

## THE MYSTERIOUS FOE.

A Romance of Red-skins, Renegades and Army  
Rencounters.

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ETC., ETC.

### CHAPTER I.

#### BUFFALO BILL'S MISSION.

"Hold! I have that man's pardon!"

The words rung like bugle-notes from the lips of a man who had dashed suddenly upon the scene of a military execution, his horse covered with foam, panting like a hound, and with flanks torn by the cruel spurs.

The execution squad stood with their guns at an aim, and the fatal order to fire was about to issue from the mouth of the officer in command, when there came the thrilling words:

"I have that man's pardon!"

But an instant too late the utterance, for several nervous fingers along the line touched the triggers, and with the report of the guns, the doomed man fell in his tracks.

A cry of horror arose from a hundred throats and a scene of excitement that placed at defiance stern discipline was about to follow, when the same trumpet voice was heard:

"Attention all! the Sioux, a thousand strong, are in yonder timber, preparing to charge upon you!"

Hardly had the warning been given when a roar of rifles was heard, bullets pattered like rain upon the field, and yells that were fearful to hear filled the air.

Loud orders were given by the commanding officer for the soldiers to form in a solid body, and the retreat was begun across the prairie to the fort an eighth of a mile distant.

Then out from the timber rode hundreds of wild horsemen, red-skins in all their hideous war-paint, and with war-cries and thundering hoofs, the Sioux came riding down upon the soldier band.

"Halt! Right about! Ready, aim, fire!" came the command of the officer to his soldiers, and a hundred guns flashed in the gathering twilight, and many a mustang and his red rider went down before the leaden hail.

But the sweeping mass came on, and it seemed as though the battalion of gallant soldiers must be ridden down, when red sheets of flame shot forth from the walls of the fort, and the deep roar of the cannon made the earth tremble.

The cheers of the soldiers on the prairie, mingling with the bursting shells, the rattle of small-arms, thundering of hoofs and wild cries of the savages made up a scene that was appalling in the increasing gloom of nightfall.

But the fire of the artillery from the fort, sending shells into the midst of the red-skin horsemen, spread terror into their ranks, and they turned and fled to the timber for shelter, though, with Indian pluck, dragging their dead and wounded with them.

Loud rung the cheers from the battalion on the prairie, and they were answered from the soldiers in the fort, who still sent shells flying into the timber.

"Captain Vaughan, I thank you for your prompt act in our great peril, for, but for your heavy guns they would have swept over us," said the officer commanding the force now marching into the fort, and addressing a young and handsome man, who came forward to greet him.

"It was not my thought, colonel, for I meant to ride out to your aid, but the orders of that dashing fellow whose horse fell dead as he reached the fort," answered Captain Grayson Vaughan.

"Ha! the same man that rode up with the order to spare Sergeant Dudley Drew."

"Yes, and he then dashed on toward the fort, ordering as he rode, in a voice that would have run along a brigade front:

"Turn your heavy guns on yonder timber!"

"Open with your artillery! The Sioux will sweep over them!"

"I saw that he was right, sprung to the nearest guns with what men I could call to my aid, and it did just what that brave fellow knew it would."

"He spurred away, after saying that he had Drew's pardon, and—"

"Then Sergeant Drew was not executed, sir?"

"Yes, for several shots were fired, just as the man rode up, and he fell."

"Then we had to look to our safety and he was left upon the field; but here comes the courier now, and I will speak with him."

The colonel who commanded the fort, and Captain Grayson Vaughan now walked toward the one who had brought the pardon at the fatal moment of the order for the execution, as he advanced to meet them.

"What a splendid specimen of manhood!" whispered the captain.

"Handsome as a picture," replied Colonel Yulee.

Halting, the person referred to gave a military salute, and said:

"I have dispatches for you, sir, if you are Colonel Yulee."

"I was sorry I did not arrive a moment sooner, sir, but my horse did his best and fell dead as I reached the fort."

The words were spoken in a quick manner, but with perfect respect.

"You did your best, sir, I am sure, and permit me to say that but for your coming as you did we would have been ridden down and massacred in that wild charge."

"Your name, please?"

"My name is William Cody, Colonel Yulee, and I am a Government scout and guide."

"What! are you the famous Buffalo Bill, the best Indian-fighter, scout and guide on the plains?"

"Yes, sir, I am Buffalo Bill," was the modest reply.

"I am glad to meet you, indeed, Cody. Permit me to introduce you to Captain Vaughan, who so promptly obeyed your orders to use his guns."

"Pardon me, Captain Vaughan, for my abrupt orders, sir, but I knew that artillery would check the red-skins, and that is why I rode on to the fort as I did."

"You need not ask my pardon, Mr. Cody, for God knows there would be wailing in this fort to-night but for you."

"Indeed there would be, Cody, and it shall be reported so in my return dispatches to the general."

"But come to my quarters, for you are my guest while here."

"Thank you, sir; but do you think I was too late to save poor Sergeant Drew?"

"Alas, yes; for he fell under the fire of some of the men who did not recover arms at your words."

"I hope he was not killed, sir; and with your permission I will go out and see."

"What! you do not mean you will go out on the prairie now, when it is doubtless filled with red-skins around the fort?"

"Yes, sir; but I will not be gone long."

"Cody, take my advice and do not do so foolhardy an act," urged the colonel.

"Yes; it would be madness," Captain Vaughan added.

"I will risk it, sir; for somehow I do not believe Sergeant Drew was killed."

After making his full report to Colonel Yulee, Buffalo Bill saluted and walked rapidly toward the gate leading from the fort.

A moment after he had passed the sentinel and disappeared in the gloom out upon the prairie.

### CHAPTER II.

#### FOR LIFE OR DEATH.

GENERAL CUSTER sat in his quarters reading his dispatches.

It was night, and a force of cavalry had just arrived in the barracks, bringing dispatches from frontier posts further west, and also the news that the Sioux were on the war-path.

As he sat in his cosy quarters, reading over the various documents lying before him, his firm face darkened, and springing to his feet he said aloud:

"This must not be; no, it must not be, for there is some wrong here."

He read over one of the papers again, and then called to an orderly, who at once presented himself at the door with a salute.

"Orderly, ask Buffalo Bill, my chief of scouts, to come here."

The orderly disappeared, and soon the noted borderman, whose name is known the world over, and who was then winning his fame, presented himself before General Custer.

Sit down, Bill, and I want to ask you what you think of sending a man to Colonel Yulee on a most important mission?"

"The colonel is at Fort Advance, is he not, sir?"

"Yes."

"The Sioux are thick between here and there, sir."

"I know that well, and my reports to-night show that matters are in a very precarious position on the far border, though of course there is no fear for Fort Advance, as Yulee has a company of artillery, a hundred cavalry and twice as many infantry, and five thousand Sioux could not capture him; but it is on another question I wish one of your best men to go."

"It seems a question, general, of certain death; but I will go and ask for a volunteer."

"Do so, Cody, and let me know at once."

The scout left the general's quarters, and the latter got up and paced the floor in a thoughtful mood.

"No, no, some man must go, for he shall not die," he thundered several times.

Soon the scout returned and General Custer said, eagerly:

"What luck?"

"Not a man will volunteer, sir, for they feel it is certain death."

"Of course I cannot order a man on a forlorn hope, Cody; but let me tell you how important it is to have one go."

"A man in Yulee's command, a sergeant at headquarters, has been tried by court-martial and sentenced to death. His offense was in shooting his superior officer, a lieutenant, wounding him severely and yet not fatally. He made no defense, said in his behalf that he had but done his duty and regretted that he had not killed Lieutenant Hobart Otey, which was the name of the officer."

"The latter is an appointed officer in the service, not being a West Point graduate, and little is known of his antecedents. Why Sergeant Dudley Drew shot him he would not say, any more than that it was a quarrel between them, and there were no witnesses."

"Now, Sergeant Drew I know well, and he once saved my life, in fact saved a party of seven of us from massacre. He was a scout then, attached to some outpost, and we were out hunting, little dreaming we were being surrounded by Indians the while. He saw them, as he was bearing dispatches, knew our danger, dashed through the Indian line and warned us, leading us to place of safety, an old cabin, where he left us while he again broke through the red-skin's ranks and riding to the outpost brought us aid, and just in the nick of time."

"He soon after joined the army as a private, and his daring advanced him to a sergeancy. He is a gentleman, belonging to a refined family, and possessing means, and some strange freak, or misfortune has made him join the army as a private soldier."

"Colonel Yulee says in his dispatches that the man is most popular with all, and that he thinks Lieutenant Otey has bitterly wronged him in some way, and that is why he recommends him to mercy, and if I will pardon him, as I have the power to do under late orders, he will break him of his rank and let him be otherwise punished."

"Now, I wish to save this man, and these dispatches having been delayed, through making a circuit on account of Indians, he has hardly twenty-four hours to live, for he is sentenced to be shot to-morrow at sunset, on the parade-ground near the fort."

"General, I will carry that pardon, sir, and any dispatches that you have to send."

"At least I will try," and the scout smiled.

"Cody, you are a brave, splendid fellow, but I cannot risk it with you."

"Still, sir, I have sounded my men and not one will go, and you know they are not men to back down where they can see one chance to get through."

"No, but do you see a chance, Bill?"

"Well, sir, I have gotten through so often where I could see no chances to do so, that I may find, when I get started, that there is one in this case."

"It is a ride of just one hundred and fifty miles."

"Yes, sir; but I will take my two best horses, one to follow, and thus relieve them as I can, and I guess I can make it."

"It will be a tremendous ride, not counting the danger."

"I will try it, sir."

"When will you be ready to start?"

"Within half an hour, sir."

And within that time Buffalo Bill rode away from the general's quarters, mounted upon a superb horse, and with a second animal, equally as good, following like a dog behind him.

"God bless you, Bill!" cried the general, as the daring scout rode away, and after him rung cheers from half a thousand throats, for all knew that he was going to face appalling odds, and bound on a mission to save a human life, risking his own in the effort to do so.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE SCOUT'S RIDE.

WHEN Buffalo Bill left the encampment of General Custer, and rode forth in the darkness, no one more than he knew the desperate dangers that would beset his path.

A child of the border, for from early boyhood he had been a dweller upon the plains, he knew the Indian cunning as few other men did, and when the Sioux were on the war-path against the further outposts and settlements, he was aware that it meant a cruel struggle for mastery ere the red-skins could be put down.

Aware of the positions of the different outposts and forts, and where the settlements were, he could judge just what the course of the Indians would be.

Their hiding-places he knew, and their intentions he could readily guess at.

To reach Fort Advance he had to pass through the midst of their roving hostile bands, and with no succor from a pale-face near.

Fort Advance was the strongest of the line of forts, and no fear was to be felt for its garrison,



as it was provisioned at all times to guard against a siege.

With no hope perhaps of taking the fort, the red-skins would surround it, to prevent reinforcements from being sent from there to aid smaller outposts and settlements.

Thus would Fort Advance be completely surrounded, and with a line of red-skins to break through, it would be a death-gantlet he would have to run to reach the place.

The fort was situated upon a hill, heavily timbered, and it had stockade walls and strong breastworks.

A swiftly-flowing stream wound around the base of the hill, so that the splendid water supply could not be cut off, a bend of the creek being included in the fortified line.

There were good cabins for the soldiers, excellent quarters for the officers, ample stable room and plenty of timber.

The parade-ground was on the prairie, at the base of the slope, and hardly an eighth of a mile distant.

Nearly a mile across the prairie was a ridge, heavily timbered, but all around the fort was under the sweep of the battery of six guns, twelve and six pounders, lately sent there, and the existence of which the Indians had not found out.

Knowing the country as he did, Buffalo Bill chose the shortest way, and pressed on at a pace which he meant his horses should keep up as long as it was possible for them to do so.

After two hours' steady travel the scout halted for a rest.

He did not spare himself, so unsaddled his horses, gave both a good rubbing down and rest of fifteen minutes, when he resumed his lonely way.

So it went on through the night, until by morning many miles had been cast behind, and the scout, feeling that he could do so, as he had a good survey of the country about him, halted for breakfast and rest.

The horses were his first care, and these were watered, rubbed down well and staked out.

Then a fire was built and the humble breakfast cooked and eaten.

This delayed Buffalo Bill an hour, and the man as well as the horses felt refreshed.

At the same steady gait he pressed on, changing from one horse to another every hour, and the short stop to do so seeming to give the animals a breathing spell.

Toward noon the scout felt that his horses were beginning to weaken under the terrible strain, and he anxiously calculated the distance yet to go and the hours to get there by sunset.

Suddenly the scout rode over a rise in the prairie and beheld a horseman not two hundred yards away.

It was a white man, and he caught sight of Buffalo Bill almost at the same instant that he was discovered.

The scout rode on, but brought his rifle around for use, for he thought that he recognized the man.

The stranger also prepared to greet friend or foe and then halted for the other to come up, for his direction was such that he was crossing the trail of Buffalo Bill.

"Ho, Buffalo Bill, is it war or friendship?" cried out the man as Cody drew near, and both were ready to draw.

"It is not war, Max Melmer, unless you wish it; but it is certainly not friendship," was the cool reply of the scout, as he advanced toward the man.

"Well, call it peace, for I want no trouble with you, Bill."

"I'm afraid, Max Melmer, if you go on as you are doing, some day it will come to war to the death between us."

"Well, you'll find me ready; but I choose my way and you take yours."

The man was tall, of muscular build, and was dressed in Indian costume, from head-dress to moccasins.

He wore a belt in which were three revolvers and a knife, carried a repeating-rifle across his Mexican saddle, and a lariat hung over the horn.

A bow and arrows also were part of his equipment, while in one hand he held a long lance, such as are carried by the Comanche Indians.

His beard and hair were worn very long, and his face would have made a good artist's model for Mephisto, so full of devilry and cunning was it.

He had been a scout for the army, had married the pretty daughter of a Sioux chief, and had then turned renegade against the whites, leading the red-skins against his own race.

A reward was offered for his head, and Buffalo Bill had long wished to capture him, but for some reasons of his own he preferred peace just then.

"Are you leading a scouting party, Bill, and how far back are they?" asked the renegade, and there was a shadow of anxiety in his tone.

"No, I am carrying dispatches to Fort Advance. Do you ride that way, for I would not mind company?"

"Yes, I'm going that way; but your dispatches must be urgent, for I see you bring two horses and have ridden them hard."

"Yes, my dispatches are important, Melmer, for it is known that you are on the war-path with your red devils."

"That is a mistake."

"You are certainly not here alone?"

"No; I have a hunting-party of braves with me, and got separated from them in chasing buffalo."

"Have you been chasing buffalo, Max?"

"Yes."

"Not on *that* horse, for he is as fresh as a prairie-flower."

"He don't show work," was the evasive reply.

"He is a splendid animal."

"He is, indeed, for there is not one on the plains that can run longer and faster," the renegade declared, proudly.

"Where are you to join your hunting-party?"

"Up toward Fort Advance."

"Then we go some distance together."

"Yes; and I am glad of it, Bill, for I have never wanted to be foes with you."

"You should never have turned renegade, then."

The man laughed and replied:

"Every one to his taste, for I like the wild life I lead."

"Is that one of your braves yonder?"

Buffalo Bill pointed over the prairie to the right as they rode along, and the renegade turned his head to look; but he quickly found that he had made a mistake for a revolver was thrust against his temple and Buffalo Bill said:

"You are my game, Renegade Melmer!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE RENEGADE.

THE quiet smile on the face of Buffalo Bill was in strange contrast to the look of horror upon that of the renegade.

The latter was too thorough a borderman not to know that the scout meant just what he said.

He was aware that a movement of his hand would cause that firm finger to draw on the trigger and a bullet would go crashing through his brain.

So he hissed:

"You are treacherous, Buffalo Bill."

"Oh, no, for I said there was no friendship, and I intend there shall be peace by nipping your claws," and as he spoke he took from the prisoner his rifle, belt of arms, arrows and lance.

Then he felt about his body for any concealed weapon, still holding his revolver at a level, and finding none took the lariat and quickly bound the renegade's hands.

"Now, Max, we will change horses."

"Are you going to steal my horse?"

"No; I am going to let you ride one of mine. It will be safer for me should we meet that hunting-party of braves, you know."

"Oh! but I will get even with you some day, Buffalo Bill."

"You are in no position to threaten, Max Melmer, so do not do so."

The scout then made his prisoner mount his horse as soon as he had changed the saddles and bridles, and the splendid animal of the renegade seemed to prefer the change to the lighter one.

"Now, Max Melmer, we will ride on at a brisk canter, and if we meet your red hunters, you'll prove a pretty good hostage, so that I can go through in safety."

"They are not on the war-path, I told you, only a hunting-party, so they will not harm you."

"I won't trust them any more than I will their pale-face chief."

"No, you shall take me through their lines in safety, or I will kill you and risk it alone."

"If I pass you through the red-skins will you let me go free?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I want you."

"What for?"

"As a present to Colonel Yulee, who commands Fort Advance."

"He will hang me."

"It is just what you deserve."

"I'm rich, Buffalo Bill, and I'll pay you your price if you will let me go."

"Your money was made by murder, horse-stealing and pillaging the settlers, and I would not touch it."

"I will give you full right to go over the plains, unmolested by any red-skins."

"I do not ask your protection."

"Do not take me to the fort."

"I will if I can get you there."

"You will never do that."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because I have fifteen hundred mounted warriors between here and Fort Advance."

"I am glad to know your force."

"Oh, I don't mind telling you, for I know you will never get through."

"And you have fifteen hundred warriors on the war-path?"

"I have."

"You expect to capture Fort Advance?"

"Yes, easily."

"I doubt it."

"I have five hundred braves along the line of settlements and outposts, and a thousand now waiting for me to lead them on Fort Advance."

"A large hunting-party, surely; but it seems you are after human game?"

"I am, and you will be my first victim."

"How so?"

"You will soon be my prisoner."

"No, I may be taken by the Sioux, I admit, but you'll not beat the scalp-dance held in honor of my scalplock."

"Why so?"

"I shall kill you, Renegade Melmer, the moment your braves fire on me."

"Do you intend to attempt to break through the line?"

"I do."

"You are a fool."

"Thank you."

"Do you know a piece of timber this side of Fort Advance?"

"I think I do."

"Well, I have a thousand horses there, and all around the fort, by night, I will have a line of warriors, though they will not be seen, of course."

"What will the scouts in the fort be doing not to know you are near?"

"We will only move near by dark, and then charge the fort."

"A nice little scheme; but you tell your plans beforehand."

"I talk to you as to a dead man, for you will not be alive at sunset."

"I see," and the scout smiled.

"You sneer at the idea."

"I never sneer at death, Renegade Melmer, for it is too sudden to fool with; but I have hopes of eating supper in the fort."

"Your horses won't hold out to get there."

"Yours will," was the laconic response.

They had been riding on at a brisk canter while talking, the scout's horses tired, and with drooping heads, but the splendid roan of the renegade fresh and anxious to go.

It was very evident to the scout that the renegade had just ridden out of some camp near, when he met him, and that he had made a lucky escape, for certainly the red-skins had not seen him.

The scout could see by the expression upon the face of Max Melmer, that he felt no anxiety as to the result, and this convinced him that the renegade had told him the truth regarding the Indians between them and Fort Advance.

The renegade could not but admire the indomitable pluck of Buffalo Bill, in still going on, when he must know what he had to face, and at the same time determined to make the effort to carry him through a prisoner with him.

As they came within ten miles of the fort, the scout saw that the prairie was cut up with many trails.

There were a dozen different parties of mounted warriors, his experienced eye told him, all heading in the direction of Fort Advance.

Ascending a rise of the prairie, upon which some scattering trees grew, he drew rein and glanced out over the miles of level prairie before him.

Afar off columns of smoke were curling upward, and he knew that they must come from the fort, where the fires were being built for the evening meal.

He took his bearings and then rode forward once more at the same brisk canter; though his horses were beginning to stagger under the hard ride, while the renegade's steed still seemed fresh.

Crossing the level stretch of prairie, they advanced toward some scattering timber land, which was broken and rolling.

"Your braves are in yonder timber," said the scout.

"How do you know?"

"Because beyond the half mile of timber cover the prairie is open all around the fort excepting the ridge you speak of, and it can be approached by horsemen without being seen by the sentinels."

"The leading bodies of my braves are already at the ridge, but you will have several hundred to break through before you get out of yonder timber," was the renegade's reply, and he smiled with perfect confidence.

"You are right, for we are already seen, as I notice mounted warriors in the timber land."

"Yes, they see us, so you had better accept my offer."

"I make no terms with you, Max Melmer; but I warn you that I will kill you if you give any alarm or sign," was the stern response.

Then he added: "Come!"

He had the three horses now abreast, and the one ridden by the renegade next to him.

The third animal carried no load, but was fastened by his stake-rope to the horse ridden by the renegade.

The scout had fastened the lance of Max Melmer in such a position that it would look as though he was carrying it, and thus they rode on.



Nearer and nearer they approached the timber, and the Sioux warriors saw them coming, but beholding their chief, had no idea that he was a prisoner.

"Not a word or a sign, sir!"

"If they speak to you, order them to await your return," hissed Buffalo Bill through his set teeth.

The renegade was now very pale, for he saw the scout's bold game, and knew, if he could not advise his braves of his danger, that he would be carried through the lines, and Buffalo Bill would take him to the fort.

But the two horses of the scout were failing fast, as the three dashed at a swinging gallop into the timber, and the one ridden by Buffalo Bill was now feeling the rapid run.

Fully a hundred Indians were in view, some mounted, others on foot near their ponies, but all watching their chief and the famous scout, whom they now recognized as the enemy of their race.

A few more rods and the line would be passed and then the scout would have nothing between him and the fort, excepting the warriors on the ridge awaiting nightfall to attack, and he could not be seen by these until too late to cut him off.

The renegade was now livid, for he saw that the scout held his hands behind him, as though to appear that he was the captive.

Death by hanging would be his fate there, and he would risk the bullet of the scout, for he knew the noble nature of Buffalo Bill, and could not believe he would shoot him, bound as he was and unable to protect himself.

So raising his deep voice he shouted in the Sioux tongue, which the scout understood well:

"Warriors, your white chief is the prisoner of Buffalo Bill; so fire on him if you kill me!"

A yell broke from half a hundred braves who heard the words, and rifles cracked and arrows flew.

Down went the horse ridden by the renegade, and the horse hitched to him, tired and tottering, was dragged to the earth with him.

But the roan bounded on under the spurs of Buffalo Bill, and escaping the hot fire, he rode through the timber like a deer.

Then a dash across a plain at terrific speed, up a rise, and the fort came in view.

Nearer and nearer, urged by the cruel spurs, the roan drew to the fort, while the eyes of Buffalo Bill were now fixed upon the solemn scene of execution.

He knew what it meant, and he knew too that the soldiers were ignorant of the savage horsemen in hiding and soon to dash out upon them.

Nearer and nearer, the sound of hoof-falls unheard on the soft prairie grass, until he was near enough to hear the fatal order of the officer:

"Ready! aim—"

Then came in thunder tones:

"Hold! I have that man's pardon!"

#### CHAPTER V.

##### THE NIGHT SEARCH.

THE sudden appearance, and wholly unexpected, of a thousand red-skins in the vicinity of the fort, had at once put all the garrison on the alert, and preparations were made for a siege or a fight.

The artillery gave great confidence to all, for it was well known in what fear the red-skins stood of the "horse guns," as they called the cannon.

Still, nothing was neglected, and the soldiers were all at their posts.

The going out of the daring scout was seen by many, and the whisper ran the rounds of the works that Buffalo Bill was the bold courier who had brought the pardon of Sergeant Drew, and that he had gone out to bring in the soldier, whom he did not believe had been killed by the straggling fire of the execution squad.

A hush fell upon the garrison at the news, and all waited in breathless suspense for his coming back.

Leaving the fort, the scout made his way in a crouching attitude toward the parade-ground, the scene of the execution.

He knew that several soldiers had fallen, who had not been brought off the field, and he did not think that the red-skins would do aught more until they recovered from their shock, or the arrival of their white chief, whom the scout knew had not been shot, having fallen with his horse, as he went down, being bound to the saddle.

The renegade might be hurt, but he did not think he was dead, and he knew the Indians would not make any important move until he gave them orders.

In their retreat, under the fire of the heavy guns, which they had not expected to find at the fort, the red-skins had carried off their killed and wounded, but the scout was aware that under the cover of darkness they would come upon the field to get the trappings from their dead ponies, while some would venture to the parade-ground to scalp the slain or wounded soldiers.

If they got there before he did, it would be no

use to look for Sergeant Drew, for, dead or alive he would be scalped along with other unfortunates who might have fallen with him.

That he was taking desperate chances he was well aware; but his eye-sight was better than that of any Indian he had ever met, he was a dead shot, powerful as a giant and knew not what fear was.

As he neared the parade-ground he got down upon his knees, pressed his ear upon the prairie and thus listened for some time.

Then he crept on gradually, nearer and nearer to the scene of the execution.

The night was very dark, for clouds obscured the stars, and it was not possible to see an object at sixty paces distant.

Nearer and nearer crept the scout, until the absence of grass beneath him told him that he was upon the well-beaten-down parade and drill ground.

Presently his eyes fell upon a dark object ahead.

Halting and gazing at it, he knew that it was a human form; but dead or alive he did not know.

"Two soldiers fell who were not brought off, they told me, so, with Sergeant Drew, there will be three," he muttered to himself.

Creeping nearer he saw another form, a short distance to the right, and still further on he beheld the third.

To this one he made his way first, for just here should lie the sergeant, whether dead or alive.

He reached the form, bent over it, placed his hand upon the heart and said:

"He is dead."

Then his eyes fell upon another dark object, and creeping to it, he saw that it was the coffin of the condemned man, and in it lay a rope to lower it into the grave dug near by.

He was about to return to the body when his eyes saw a shadowy form coming toward him.

Instantly Buffalo Bill dropped down behind the coffin, into the grave, while he muttered grimly:

"Let that red-skin come on, for I've got a coffin here ready for him, and a grave, too!"

The Indian, as the scout now saw that it was, came on slowly and with noiseless tread.

He was evidently the advance scout for others, coming for the scalps of the fallen soldiers.

#### CHAPTER VI.

##### OUT OF A GRAVE.

AN Indian who was cautiously approaching the open grave, in which crouched Buffalo Bill, and by the side of which was the coffin intended for Sergeant Drew, came on with the air of one who seemed to have more fear of the living than the dead.

The Sioux had seen that several soldiers had fallen under their fire; but so demoralized had they been by the fire of the artillery from the fort that they had not rallied very quickly, and it had been dark some time before it entered the heads of some of the bolder ones to go after the scalps as a slight return for what they had lost.

So a chief went ahead, wishing to add greater glory to his name, and ordered his braves to follow at quite a distance behind.

It was this chief, thirsting for red-skin glory, who was making his way toward the scout.

He saw the open grave, the coffin and the body near, as he stood contemplating the scene.

He did not, however, see the inhabitant of that open grave.

Having taken in the situation he approached the coffin first.

It was not the Indian way to box up the dead, and this instance of civilization on the part of the pale-faces seemed to interest him, for he sat down upon the coffin, as though he wished to contemplate, as a cat would a mouse, the body lying near, ere he scientifically deprived the head of its scalp-lock, according to the custom of his fathers.

He had hardly taken his seat, when up rose the scout; his hands closed about the neck of the red-skin with vise-like grip, and he was dragged backward into the pit.

That there was a desperate struggle going on in that sepulcher was evident from the hard breathing and dull blows that came from there.

Then all was still, and a form peered above the grave.

It was Buffalo Bill.

He glanced out quickly and eagerly across the prairie, and down he went out of sight.

The cause of this was in seeing a dozen forms coming across the prairie and not fifty feet away.

They looked as shadowy as specters, and were as silent; but they were Indians, and most dangerous customers.

"They've got me in a hole," thought Buffalo Bill, making this grim joke of his perilous situation.

Silently they came on, and in a few seconds halted, for their eyes had fallen upon the various dark objects before them.

They recognized the dead bodies, and having seen the arrangements for the execution from

their hiding-place, could guess what was the meaning of the coffin and the grave.

Coming cautiously forward once more they halted within ten feet of the grave.

Then they looked about them, in search for their chief.

As he had given no warning of danger, they did not suspect anything wrong; but it was their nature to be cautious.

If they found the heads of the soldiers scalped, then their chief had reaped his red reward; but if they found that the scalps still remained, then it would be their pleasure to take them.

In low voices they held a short discussion, but the scout could only catch the drift of their words, so low they spoke, and that was their speculation regarding which way their chief had gone.

Having decided to again advance they did so, glanced at the pile of earth thrown from the grave, turned the coffin over, and then one of them stepped quickly to the side of the dead soldier and bent over him.

An ejaculation of delight told the scout that he had discovered the scalp had not been taken, and that it would be his pleasure to remove the gory trophy.

But, suddenly, out of the grave came a flash and sharp report from Buffalo Bill's revolver, and a shriek was followed by startled yells and the bounding away of the spectral forms.

But the revolver of the scout flashed twice more, and two more red-skins went down.

To say that those braves were scared would be to speak mildly, for they were absolutely terrified, and went springing into the air and from one side to the other, in the peculiar red-skin way, as though they were dodging bullets.

They had run fifty feet from the grave before the few who had revolvers or rifles thought of firing them, and they did this at random.

In spite of his danger Buffalo Bill laughed, and he kept his revolvers rattling to hasten the flight of the paint-bedaubed warriors.

The moment they were out of sight the scout sprang from the grave, and quickly running to each fallen warrior he stooped over them and in an instant their scalps hung at his belt, for well he knew that a red-skin is never dead until he is scalped.

The yells of the frightened Indians had been heard and echoed afar off by hundreds of demoniacal howls from their comrades, and the scout realized that he was in fearful peril.

But suddenly a bright flame shot forth from the fort, and a shrieking shell came flying high in air over the parade ground, bursting far beyond.

"Bravo for the thoughtful man that fired that gun, for it will save me," said the brave scout to himself.

Then he leant over the open grave and said something in the Sioux tongue. A moment after a form arose and the scout dragged it out.

It was the captured chief, and his hands were bound behind his back, his feet hobbled and a rope gag was in his mouth.

Unfastening the feet of his captive, Buffalo Bill led him quickly to the side of the soldier's body, and stooping, placed the limp form upon the back of the chief.

The red-skin demurred, and seemed about to resist, gagged and bound as he was; but Buffalo Bill pointed to the open grave and spoke a few stern words in the Sioux tongue.

Whatever it was, it caused resistance to cease, and the body was quickly strapped upon the back of the humbled chief, who was then forced to move forward to the next fallen soldier.

This one the scout raised in his strong arms and carried to the side of his fallen comrade.

Grasping the second one about the body, he motioned for the chief to precede him, and with his double load began his retreat, and as he staggered along Buffalo Bill muttered:

"No red-skin's scalping-knife shall desecrate your heads, my gallant fellows."

At every ten paces the scout would halt, rest an instant and glance behind him, for he knew not what instant a pack of savages would be upon his heels.

Then he would resume his load of dead humanity and struggle on as before.

#### CHAPTER VII.

##### WATCHING AND WAITING.

THERE was no more popular man in the army than was Colonel Royal Yulee. He was a thorough soldier, a perfect disciplinarian, yet withal a kind commander and a genial gentleman.

He had won fame, and while bordering on half a century of years was yet full of life and dash. A man of wealth, and therefore one who could take his ease, did he so desire, he yet preferred the life of a soldier, the hardships of camp life, and always urged to remain in active duty upon the border.

Thus had he won the name of an Indian-fighter to be relied upon, and had been given the most important command on the far frontier.

Captain Grayson Vaughan was his favorite officer, and his adjutant.

Young, handsome, an heir to a fortune, Cap-



tain Vaughan also preferred life on the plains to the humdrum existence of a city, and he had the name of being one of the most daring officers in Fort Advance, and that was saying a great deal, for among the cavalry, artillery and infantry companies that comprised the garrison there were gallant, dashing soldiers to be numbered by the score.

Going to his quarters, accompanied by Captain Grayson, Colonel Yulee had read over his dispatches, brought by Buffalo Bill, and the letter of General Custer saying why he pardoned Sergeant Dudley Drew.

"Vaughan, somehow I think General Custer knows more about Drew than he has written, and I regret exceedingly that he was shot, for I liked the man immensely."

"And so did I, colonel; but then he may have been only wounded, as Cody suggested, and come round all right, if he can bring him in."

"I hope so, but I fear to the contrary."

"And the men who fired, sir, without the order?"

"I can do nothing with them, for to tell you the truth the little bunch of scrub-oaks hid Cody until he was right upon us almost, and Talbot had given the words 'Ready, aim,' when the scout's voice shouted 'Hold!'"

"Half the men of the platoon thought it was Talbot's voice, and involuntarily some of them touched the trigger, and one or more bullets struck Drew, who fell in his tracks."

"The words of Cody, the excitement of his coming, the charge of the Indians a moment after prevented any one seeing whether Drew was killed or not, and, in fact, the two men who were killed under the fire of the Indians had to be also left upon the field, though we did bring off our wounded."

"I cannot see, sir, that any censure can fall upon any one in the matter, for Cody, as he says, broke down two of his own horses in coming here, and the animal he took from that renegade dropped dead from the strain as he reached the fort."

"Yes, he made a marvelous ride, and had a wonderful escape."

"He is a man of astonishing nerve and endurance, Vaughan."

"He is indeed, Colonel Yulee; but I wished to ask you, sir, about poor Drew. I suppose he died with the same courage he has shown throughout his trial?"

"He did indeed, and asked that his arms should not be pinioned."

"He saluted me before Talbot gave his orders, smiled at the platoon that was to kill him, and said in a voice without a quiver:

"I am ready."

"He was a strange man, and I am sure had a history of interest."

"I am half-way inclined to believe that there is more back of his shooting Lieutenant Otey than appeared at the trial; but he would not say what, and Otey held his peace."

"So I believe, colonel; but I am anxious about that brave scout, so shall we go out to the parapet and see if aught has been heard of him?"

"Yes, for I wish to make the rounds and see that all are at their posts, though, of course, Major Brown has neglected nothing; still, with fifteen hundred Indians around us, it is important not to be caught napping, and Cody gave that as the number you remember."

The colonel and his adjutant now left their quarters and walked toward the outer line of defense of the fort.

They joined the officer at the heavy stockade gate, and found there the men standing ready at the gun which Captain Vaughan had opened on the Indians with so promptly at the command of Buffalo Bill.

Captain Talbot, the officer who had commanded the execution, stood there, conversing with the lieutenant, who had charge of the gun, and they, with the soldiers near, were gazing out into the gloom on the prairie, apparently watching and waiting.

"Is there a line of scouts out now, Captain Talbot?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, sir, I ordered them to take their stand at the sentry posts one hundred yards off, and to fire if they discovered any movement of the Indians."

"That was right; but I suppose you sent the scouts out, and not the soldiers?"

"Yes, sir, and all of them, so that they form a line around the fort."

"Then we cannot be surprised, though the Indians could not get over the works if they got to them, before we could beat them back, and ten to one could not take it; but have you heard nothing of that daring fellow, Cody?"

"No, sir; but I sent his saddle and bridle up to your quarters, and it is a perfect arsenal, for he has a rifle and a belt of arms tied to it, not to speak of a bow and arrows and lariat," and Captain Talbot laughed.

Those are the arms of that infamous renegade, Max Melmer, the white chief of the Sioux, whom he captured, and would have gotten to the fort with him, had not the red-skins shot the horse which the scamp was riding—ha! what is that?"

All eyes now turned out upon the prairie, where three quick flashes were seen, followed by

a wild shriek of agony, and cries of mingled terror and fury.

A moment after other flashes were seen, and these appeared to come from running men, going from the fort.

The flashes, quick as they were, had been vivid enough to show several forms upon the prairie, and Captain Vaughan called out:

"It is that brave Buffalo Bill, and he is on the parade-ground surrounded by Indians."

"Quick! throw a shell over them, Duval!" the colonel ordered, and the gun belched forth its flame and iron, and the shell burst beyond where the flashes had been seen.

Then all was silence once more, after the wild whoops of the red-skins in the timber, who knew that misfortune had befallen some of their comrades; but if they had anticipated charging to the rescue, that firing of the bursting shell checked their ardor in a wonderful degree.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE RETURN.

As all remained silent out upon the prairie, after the gun had been fired, Colonel Yulee ordered a second shell to be sent over toward where the red-skins were lurking, and this brought forth renewed yells of fury, and the flash revealed horsemen retreating out of range.

"I fear the scout has been sacrificed to his daring," the colonel sadly remarked.

"Permit me to take a squad of men and go as far as the parade-ground, sir?" pleaded Grayson Vaughan.

"No, Vaughan, you can see nothing in the darkness, and we cannot afford any more sacrifices to-night."

"Perhaps, Colonel Yulee, if I advanced with a cavalry company we could discover just what has taken place on the parade-ground," urged the young adjutant.

"No, Vaughan, I will not let you and the brave fellows become targets in this darkness for lurking Indians."

Seeing that the colonel was determined, Captain Vaughan gave up the idea and stood watching with the others.

Suddenly the sentinel not far distant called out:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

All was at once the deepest attention.

"Friend!" came the response in a clear voice.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign!" returned the sentinel.

"I'll advance, sentinel, but I cannot give you the countersign, as I do not know it."

"The scout's voice!" cried the colonel, and then he called out:

"Ho, Cody! is that you?"

"Yes, Colonel Yulee, and I have company."

"All right! Come along! Sentinel, let him pass!"

The colonel, Grayson Vaughan and several other officers now hurried down to the gate, and they were greatly amazed to see Buffalo Bill and his captive chief stagger in under the loads they carried.

The large lamp swinging over the arched entrance of the gate, revealed the Indian chief, his hands tied, and upon his back, strapped firmly to him, the body of a dead soldier.

Just behind the chief came Buffalo Bill, with one dead soldier thrown over his right shoulder, the other grasped under his left arm.

It was a strange, a striking picture, and the appearance of the scout as he gladly laid down his heavy load revealed the fact that he had been rolling in the dirt.

At his belt hung three scalp-locks, and his costume was considerably disarranged.

The chief looked as though he had been caught in a street-sweeper, for his face was bleeding, his fine feathers were limp and broken, his war-paint had lost its brilliancy and he was dirt-colored from head to feet.

His black eyes glared savagely upon the officers in front of him, but he was silent, except for his hard-drawn breath.

"Buffalo Bill, I am happy indeed to see you back; but, what in Heaven's name does all this mean?" cried Colonel Yulee.

"Let me unload my pack-horse, colonel, and I will tell you, for this dead sergeant is no light load for the chief," answered Buffalo Bill.

And he began to untie the lariat that held the body to the Indian's back.

"Ha! have you Sergeant Drew there, and is he dead?"

"Yes, colonel, he is dead."

"But it is *not* Sergeant Drew."

"Not the sergeant, sir?"

"No; it is a private in I Company of Infantry."

"I found him near the coffin, sir, and by the grave."

"It is not Sergeant Drew, nor are either of these two poor fellows; but I did not think we left but two men dead on the field."

"I found these three, sir, as you see, and this one I took to be the sergeant, as he lay nearest the grave."

"It is not he, Cody."

"I saw no other there, sir."

"Then the Indians had carried him off."

"No, sir; this red gentleman is the first of the Indians who put in an appearance, and I saw him coming."

"I think he is a chief of considerable importance."

And turning to the Indian he said in the Sioux tongue:

"You are great chief, Fighting Fox?"

The chief seemed pleased to be recognized, and said in response:

"Yes; me Fighting Fox; big chief."

"I thought so," remarked the scout.

"How did you catch him, Cody?" asked Colonel Yulee.

"I saw him coming, and so I dropped into the grave. He felt his importance, so made his warriors stay behind until he had had a little fun all to himself. He spied the coffin and seemed to think it an easy-chair, so sat down upon it and I reached up and pulled him backward into the grave."

The officers laughed heartily at this, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"He is a large Indian as you see, colonel; but he was so terribly surprised and frightened that I mastered him very quickly, after a little choking, and then I tied and gagged him, for I expected his friends along very soon."

"And they came, from those three fresh scalps you wear?"

Buffalo Bill took the scalps and threw them upon the ground, while he said earnestly:

"Colonel, a white man should not take scalps, I suppose; but then the Indians glory over a dead brave, as you know, who is not scalped, and I wished that chief to feel that his warriors were thoroughly dead."

"But how did you kill them?"

"They came along after their chief."

"The three of them?"

"With about nine more, and as one of them jumped for the body of the man I took for Sergeant Drew, I fired, and then let two others have it."

"You should have seen them as those shots came up from that grave! They just started on the back trail at a mile a minute scoot, and I never saw Indians so scared. Why, they never fired until they got a good start and then shot up in the air I think, for I heard no bullets fly near me."

"As soon as I had started them on their race I concluded I wanted to stay no longer, and, not wishing to have the soldiers scalped, my friend Fighting Fox helped me fetch 'em in."

"I like to have got a shot from your line of scouts, only the man I was lucky enough to come upon was a cool-headed fellow, and he neither lost his nerve or his head at sight of us."

"Well, Cody, you have done what no other man I ever met could do; but I am sorry about Drew."

"So am I, sir."

"Captain Talbot, please have the poor fellows removed and prepared for burial, and the prisoner taken to the guard-house," ordered Colonel Yulee, and then he led the scout away with him to his quarters, Captain Vaughan accompanying them, more and more interested in the daring man who bore the appellation of Buffalo Bill.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SERGEANT AT HOME.

To let the reader understand more fully the situation of affairs at Fort Advance, prior to the scenes related in the foregoing chapters, I must go back to a time a month before the execution of Sergeant Dudley Drew.

Seated in a small log cabin within the fort was a man of striking appearance, one who looked more fitting to wear epaulets upon his shoulders than the stripes of an ordnance sergeant upon his arm.

All of six feet, with broad shoulders, an athletic, graceful form, small feet and hands, and a face that was intensely expressive, handsome and intelligent, a manner calm, yet commanding, he was one to attract observation in any assemblage.

His uniform was neat and fitted him well, and he was cleaning a revolver with the air of one who understood the need of having a weapon in perfect condition.

His surroundings were peculiar and attractive, for his cabin was without doubt meant for but one occupant.

It stood by itself, some fifty paces from the row of cabins, the quarters of his soldier comrades.

It was built of logs, yet it was a perfect picture of a handsome mansion without.

Within it was but a single room, with a broad fire-place, over which was an exquisitely-carved mantle of cedar.

A rustic bedstead, with carved posts, a table-desk skillfully made of different woods, several unique easy-chairs, an easel upon which stood a painting just completed, the portrait of a beautiful maiden, with great, large, sad, beautiful eyes and a face of exquisite loveliness, made up the furniture of the room, if I except some sketches and colorings on the wall, a pair of rapiers over the mantle, a pair of dueling-



pistols beneath them, a guitar suspended by a ribbon, some books and a few minor articles.

The person in this little solitary cabin was Sergeant Dudley Drew, a man who had enlisted in the army some time before, and whose daring had rapidly raised him to the position of ordnance sergeant at Fort Advance, and who, in the absence of a commissioned officer to fill the position was acting as such.

A man of refinement and education, Colonel Yulee had readily granted him permission to build a little cabin for himself and live apart, while his doing so had angered his comrades, although he had told them he wished only to live alone to keep up his study of art.

A few days before an officer had come to the fort who had been placed in charge of the ordnance department, not from any neglect or incapacity of the sergeant, but simply because he had been assigned to that duty.

As the sergeant sat there in his little cabin cleaning his revolver, a sad expression rested upon his fine face.

It disappeared, however, as he heard a step approaching, and his expression was that of perfect serenity.

"Ah, sergeant, I find you at work, as I supposed I would, and I dropped in to have a little chat with you," said the visitor, a man wearing the rank of a quartermaster sergeant, and whose face was by no means an attractive one.

"Sit down, Sergeant Sayles, though I am afraid you will not find me a very entertaining host, as you know I have just returned from a scouting expedition of two weeks and am very tired."

"Yes; I knew that you had gone off with Captain Talbot, and he says you are as good a scout as the best of them."

"He flatters me."

"No; the men say the same."

"Well, I have passed considerable time upon the border, and should be pretty well up in prairie craft."

"But I forgot to ask you how you like your new commander?"

"To whom do you refer?"

"Lieutenant Hobart Otey, the new ordnance officer—but, great God! Drew, what ails you?" the sergeant cried as he saw Dudley Drew spring to his feet, turn livid and seem as though he was about to fall.

"Nothing, for I am all right now."

"It was simply one of my old attacks, but it is over."

"I feared you had a stroke of paralysis and were going to die."

"Oh, no, it is nothing."

"You turned white as a ghost, and—"

"I say it was nothing," sharply said the sergeant.

"All right, I am glad you are yourself again; but I was talking of the new lieutenant. How do you like him?"

"I have been off on a scout, as you know, so have not seen him since his arrival."

"Well, the colonel gave you such a splendid record the lieutenant is anxious to see you, and I heard him say half an hour ago, as you had returned, he would walk over to see you."

"Indeed, he is very kind; but you must excuse me now, Sergeant Sayles, as I have to go out on business," and so saying Dudley Drew arose and his visitor departed.

But Sergeant Drew did not go out just then, but paced to and fro, his hands clasped upon his forehead. Not a word did he utter, but his face was white and stern, and his eyes blazed with an almost wicked light. At length he put on his hat and walked out, leaving the door of his cabin ajar.

Hardly had he disappeared among the cabins, when an officer, wearing a lieutenant's insignia on his fatigue uniform, came toward the little house. He rapped at the door, and getting no reply shoved it open and entered.

He was a man of thirty, with a dark face, sinister in expression it might be, and yet a face full of fascination.

It was the countenance of a man to admire, but not to trust. His form was elegant, his air that of a soldier dandy; but yet there seemed a reserve force about him that might prove very strong if put to the test.

"Well, my sergeant is a tony fellow and no mistake. Books, yes, and of a classic character; a guitar, rapiers, a superb pair of dueling pistols, carved furniture, some models in clay, and really very pretty colorings in the way of pictures."

"Ah! he has a work upon his easel now, and I will take the liberty of glancing at it."

He drew aside the cover as he spoke, and which the sergeant had thrown over it when Sayles entered, and immediately he staggered back, while from his lips broke the cry:

"Great God! her face here to haunt me!"

#### CHAPTER X.

##### FACE TO FACE.

"YES, Hobart Otey, and I am here to haunt you, as well as her face."

An exclamation of surprise broke from the lips of the lieutenant, who was standing gazing upon the portrait when the voice fell upon his ears.

He turned quickly and beheld Sergeant Dudley Drew.

The face of the sub-officer was pale, but calm, the lips hard set, and the eyes blazing.

"Who are you?" he gasped, rather than asked, while his face whitened as he caught sight of the burning eyes of the sergeant.

"I am Dudley Drew, ordnance-sergeant at the fort, and your under officer," was the reply.

"You are impertinent, sir, in your words and manner."

"Do you think so?"

"I do, and shall report you to Colonel Yulee," and Lieutenant Hobart Otey made a movement as though to leave the cabin.

"Hold on, Lieutenant Otey."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I stand between you and liberty."

"Do you dare to bar my way?"

"I do."

"Man, are you mad?"

"It is a wonder that I am not."

"I believe you are, in faith."

"You have done much to make me so."

"I never saw you before."

"Does one have to see another to wrong him?"

"How have I wronged you?"

"In many ways."

"I deny it, for I would wrong no man, could I help it."

The sergeant laughed, but it was a harsh, bitter laugh, and the officer did not like it.

"You are an officer, and therefore considered a gentleman."

"Ha! you still cast insults in my teeth?"

"I say that as an officer you should be a gentleman; but you are a late growth in the army, appointed to it from family influence, and your sensibilities of honor were doubtless blunted by your career before you got your shoulder-straps."

"This is too much, and I will not stand more but you shall suffer for this."

"You have made me suffer before."

"I do not know you, madman, so stand aside and let me pass."

"I will not, until you have heard all that I have to say."

"Then I shall hurl you aside."

The lieutenant made a movement forward as he spoke: but sharp came the words:

"Stand back, sir, for I am armed and you are not, and I will shoot you as I would a biting cur, if you press me."

"The man is indeed mad," muttered the officer.

The sergeant laughed and then said almost fiercely:

"Do you recognize that portrait?"

"I do."

"Who is it?"

"I do not consider that your business, sir."

"I make it so."

"I refuse to answer."

"You find her portrait here in my cabin."

"And it surprises me beyond measure."

"I will surprise you still more."

"In what manner?"

"Is it a good portrait?"

"The work is exceedingly well executed."

"And the likeness?"

"Perfect."

"You should know."

"Who is the artist?"

"I am!"

"Impossible!"

The sergeant smiled and replied:

"I painted it from memory."

"That also is impossible, for it could not be."

"It is, though; but I ask you who it is a portrait of?"

"I do not intend to tell you."

"I will save you the trouble then. It is the face of her who was your wife."

The lieutenant started under the words, and said:

"If she was, she is now."

"Not so."

"What do you mean?"

"You placed her in an asylum for the insane."

"How know you this?"

"I know it."

"She was insane."

"She was not when you placed her there, but you drove her insane, ay, forced her in her madness to take her own life."

"I do not believe that she committed suicide and never have."

"Still the fact remains that she left the asylum at night, in a storm and threw herself into a torrent."

"Her body was never found."

"That is no reason she did not die, and you, Hobart Otey, I regard as her murderer."

"In Heaven's name who are you, man?"

"An avenger!"

"What! do you mean me harm?"

"I am no coward to kill a man in my power, sir."

"What do your strange words mean?"

"They mean that I hold you in my power, Hobart Otey. They mean that you have bitterly wronged me and all that I love."

"I wear the uniform of the army, and I have served faithfully as a soldier for nearly two years now; but I have served myself the while, for there were men in the army who disgraced the uniform, men who brought ruin and death upon many I love, and I am now a Nemesis, hunting them down. What success I have met with matters not to you, so long as you and I are now face to face."

"Man, you are indeed mad, and I will call for aid, for I have no desire to be shot down by a madman."

"Call for aid, and I tell my story."

The lieutenant seemed to shrink under the words, and the sergeant smiled in triumph.

After a moment of silence he said:

"Lieutenant Otey, I am but a sergeant, you a commissioned officer, but you must waive rank in this case."

"In what respect?"

"You must meet me in a personal combat."

"Fight a duel with you?"

"Just that."

"This is preposterous."

"Either fight me with swords, pistols or rifles, man to man, alone, without witnesses, on tomorrow afternoon, or I will brand you for what you are, and have you dismissed from the service."

"Ha! you make this threat?"

"I do, and I will keep it."

The lieutenant gazed into the face of the man before him, and seemed to read there determination to carry out his purpose.

So he said:

"Tell me your cause of quarrel against me?"

"I will let you know ere I kill you."

"What! do you threaten to kill me?"

"If I can, when we face each other in a duel."

"There must be no witnesses?"

"Not a soul."

"You will swear to this?"

"I will, for I want no witnesses."

"How can a meeting be arranged?"

"Easily enough. I often get permission to go for a hunt on the prairie, and I will await you two hours before sunset at the spring on the ridge to the south of the fort."

"You can ride out alone and easily find it, and I will be there."

"If I kill you, as I certainly shall?"

"You can let it be supposed that Indians did it; scalp me if you wish, to carry out the cheat still better."

"And if I should fall?"

"Then I will be avenged."

"But what will you do?"

"That will be of no interest to you then," was the laconic response.

"Come, my man, let us drop this matter and be friends."

"No, meet me as I demand, or take the consequences."

Lieutenant Otey was silent a moment, and then he said firmly:

"So be it; I will meet you."

"Upon your honor as 'a soldier?'"

"Yes."

The sergeant instantly stepped aside and allowed the officer to pass out of the cabin.

#### CHAPTER XI.

##### SELF-SACRIFICE.

WHEN Lieutenant Hobart Otey left the cabin of the sergeant, the latter stood for a moment gazing after him; then, as he disappeared among the cabins, he turned with a sigh and fixed his eyes upon the portrait.

For a long time he stood regarding this, and then seating himself before the easel took up his brush and put on it a few finishing touches.

"It is finished," he muttered. "Yes, finished the very day that I met him!"

He bowed his head in his hands and seemed to suffer from some great sorrow; then he arose and said, almost harshly:

"He will not dare to fail to be there! No, no, he must meet me, but I must look out for treachery, for I will not trust him."

So saying, he left the cabin and went about the duties devolving upon him.

In the mean time Colonel Yulee had said to the new ordnance officer:

"Well, Otey, how do you like Sergeant Drew?"

"He seems to be a man of great refinement and education, sir."

"He is, and I wonder that he is content to remain in the army in a low rank."

"Do you know aught about him, sir?"

"Nothing, I may say."

"Is he an American, Colonel Yulee?"

"I think that is evident."

"He appears to be quite an artist."

"He is, indeed, far above the average amateur."

"Do you think, sir, Dudley Drew is his right name?"

"That I cannot tell you; but he enlisted under that name, and I have no reason to doubt its being *bona fide*."

"I went once to his cabin and we had a talk together, sir; but I fear that there is some mystery regarding the man."

"So do I; but I have no right to look into his



antecedents, so long as he does his duty well, and certainly he is as good a soldier as I ever saw."

Lieutenant Otey left the colonel's quarters disappointed, for he was in hopes of finding out something about the mysterious sergeant.

"I must meet him, or he will ruin me, for he has the power to do so. Yes, I will go, and—"

He left his thoughts unuttered, and began his preparations for his meeting with the sergeant.

The latter had arisen early, as was his wont, and then obtained permission to go for a hunt on the prairies.

So he started out on foot, throwing his rifle across his shoulder.

He went in a different direction from the ridge, and reaching the bank of the creek stopped, drew off his heavy boots, and replaced them with moccasins. Then he made a circuit of several miles, so as not to be seen from the fort, and reached the ridge.

There was a fine spring there, well known to the Indians, and where wild animals were wont to come to quench their thirst, for the water was icy cold and clear as crystal.

A short tour of the ridge timber showed that there was no one in its shelter, and then the sergeant threw himself down to rest, for he had an hour or more before the time for Lieutenant Otey to arrive.

At last he arose and saw a horseman approaching across the prairie.

"He is coming, for he does not come directly from the fort. He expects to kill me, and then carry out my suggestion, take my scalp and ride in haste back to the fort to report that he found me dead. We shall see."

The lieutenant rode up very cautiously, and seemed to fear an attack from the sergeant.

But the latter called out:

"There is no danger, sir, for I am not an assassin. I have brought my rapiers, as you are noted for the use of them, I believe."

"I will fight you with them," eagerly said the officer, for he seemed to feel with a sword he had no equal.

The lieutenant dismounted, hitched his horse, and the sergeant handed him the two weapons to select from.

"They are both alike."

"As you see, Lieutenant Otey."

"Then either will do," and he took the one he held in his hand.

"If these fail us, sir, we will use my dueling pistols, for you also have the name of being a good shot."

"The swords will not fail, sir," was the significant response of the officer.

"If they do we can stand twenty paces apart, walk five paces to where our weapons lay, loaded, pick them up and fire."

"The blades will not fail, sir," again said the lieutenant, with a peculiar look.

"Let us take our places, sir, and see."

They took their positions and crossed blades, and then Lieutenant Otey said:

"Now, sir, who are you?"

"You shall know in good time, sir," was the reply.

Then sharply came the words:

"Defend yourself!"

Instantly the combat was begun, and with all his skill the officer was driven back step by step from the first.

He knew at once that he had met his master, and he fought only on the defensive.

This seemed to unnerve him, for he was by no means as cool as his adversary, who smiled as he fought, until suddenly tiring of the work, he struck the sword of the officer from his hand and then thrust the point of his blade against his breast.

Hobart Otey seemed to feel that his life must end, for he turned livid, started back, and his hand dropped upon his hip; but the sergeant lowered his weapon quickly, and said:

"I cannot kill a man, sir, who holds no weapon in his hand. We will try the pistols, and you may prove yourself a better shot than you are a swordsman."

"Let us stop this farce, for you have given me my life."

"Yes, because you are disarmed; but I came here to kill you."

"And you demand another meeting?"

"I do."

"I will not grant it."

"You will, or take the consequences."

An impatient oath burst from the white lips of the officer, and he said:

"Come, get your pistols, and I will load mine."

"They are both loaded, sir, and you will take your choice, for one has a bullet."

The lieutenant selected one of the pistols, placed it, as did the sergeant his, upon spots ten paces apart, and then the two stepped off five paces, wheeled and faced each other.

"Now tell me who you are, sir?"

"Look at the name on that pistol, sir, and you will know who I am."

The lieutenant obeyed and his face became livid, while he said in a low tone:

"You then are—"

"Forward, march!"

The command of the sergeant broke in upon

the words of the officer, and both stepped briskly forward.

At the fifth step the sergeant cried:

"Fire!"

The weapons flashed together, and the sergeant stood erect, while Lieutenant Otey fell his length upon the ground.

"I knew it was fate for me to have the loaded weapon, and it has brought me my revenge—no, he is not dead!"

He sprang to the side of the wounded man, who faintly said:

"Water."

The sergeant brought it from the spring.

Then he examined his wound, and said in a disappointed way:

"This wound may not be mortal. I cannot kill a wounded man, and I will not leave you here to die."

"What will you do?"

"Take you to the fort."

He led the horse of the wounded man near, collected his weapons, and then placed him, with a wonderful exhibition of strength, in the saddle, and then leaped up behind to support him.

"You will sacrifice yourself," said the officer, in a low tone.

"You will not give the true reason of our meeting, and I will take the risks; but I will not leave you here to die," was the noble response.

And then toward the fort he headed his horse, and arriving there he said to the officer of the day:

"I quarreled with Lieutenant Otey and shot him, sir."

He was seized, placed in irons, and a month after was led forth to execution, as the reader has seen.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A WELL-SET TRAP.

"WELL, Cody, I guess that arch renegade, Max Melmer, has given up all idea of capturing Fort Advance, and has returned to his mountain fastnesses," said Colonel Yulee, the day after the arrival of Buffalo Bill at the fort.

"He has doubtless retreated, sir, toward the mountains, though he certainly has struck some of the settlements and smaller outposts, and Captain Vaughan, whom you sent out with a hundred men this morning, will have a battle with them I am sure before they reach the foothills."

"Yes; and Vaughan will give a good account of himself, too, you may be sure. He begged hard to take you with him, but I felt I could not permit it, as I had to send you back to General Custer with return dispatches; but, is it not strange about that poor fellow, Sergeant Drew?"

"You mean that his body was not found, sir?"

"Yes."

"He was found by the Indians, sir, I guess, and carried off."

"You think he was not dead?"

"They would hardly carry him off if he was dead, but only scalp him and leave the body."

"That is so; but may he not have been wounded, and made his escape before they came up?"

"In that case he would have returned to the fort, sir."

"Not while under sentence of death."

"He must have heard my words that I had a pardon for him, Colonel Yulee."

"That is so, and it but adds to the mystery."

"How is the officer he wounded, sir?"

"Improving slowly, for he had a very narrow escape. He really seems much better, the surgeon said, since he knows that Drew is dead, or rather believes that he is."

After further conversation it was decided that Buffalo Bill should start back with his dispatches that night. Colonel Yulee presented him with a magnificent horse, one of his own, and an animal that had a name as a racer and one with wonderful staying powers in a long race.

"Whenever you wish a place as chief of scouts in my command, Cody, you have but to ask for it."

"Good-by and good luck to you always," said Colonel Yulee, as the scout mounted his horse to start upon his perilous return journey.

As he rode from the gate the garrison had assembled to see him off, and three rousing cheers were given him.

Once out of the fort, he started on the trail by which he had come. He knew that, because the scouts reported no Indians in the vicinity of Fort Advance that morning, it was no true sign that there were none, for lurking bands in hiding might escape the keenest eyes.

Captain Vaughan had gone out at the head of a hundred troopers, to try and cut the renegade and his warriors off in their retreat, and this may have driven the red-skins from the vicinity of the fort.

Still Buffalo Bill rode with the caution of a man who always lived with his life in peril, and from which his own nerve alone could save him from death.

He found Hussar, the colonel's gift to him, a splendid animal, with a long stride that carried him rapidly over the ground.

After a ride of several hours he came to a ridge that he must cross, and which was well

wooded. It was not very far from where he had met the renegade, on his way to the fort, and he knew that he was very likely to find red-skins in the neighborhood, as from that point the trails led to the mountains where they had their villages.

He approached the ridge with great caution; but as he entered it all was deathlike silence excepting the howling of a wolf, answered by the whining yelp of a coyote.

"Where they are the Indians cannot be, at least near them, so I guess that Red Heart, the Renegade, has retreated to the mountains, to await a more fitting time to war on the settlements."

"Oh, but he is a scamp, and I almost wish that I had shot him as his horse went down that day."

The timber through which the scout was riding was heavy, thick with foliage, and intensely dark. But the trail was well marked and the horse could follow it readily.

By making a circuit of thirty miles the scout could have avoided the ridge; but he was anxious to get back as soon as possible, and also to save his horse the extra long ride; hence he went through by the trail over the ridge.

Coming to the descent, the trail was bordered by large trees, within an arm's reach, as one rode along; but as the path to the mountains led away from the top of the hill, the scout did not expect to find red-skins on the south side, and was thinking that he would have no more trouble, when his horse stopped suddenly with a swaying motion that threw him back almost upon his haunches.

"Ho, Hussar, have you lost the trail?" called out the scout, thinking the animal had run upon a clump of wild vines.

"No, the horse is in the trail, but hemmed in with lariats upon all sides. You cannot escape, Buffalo Bill!"

The voice came from behind a tree near.

The response of the scout was to fire a shot in the direction of the voice, and then to wheel his horse and dart back the way he had come; but, to his amazement the animal had not gone a dozen paces before he was thrown back upon his haunches with a suddenness that very nearly laid him on the ground.

The trail behind him had been closed in the same way it was in front.

Mocking laughter was then heard, and the same voice called out from the blackness:

"It is no use, Buffalo Bill; for you are like a fly in a spider's web."

"I'd know that devilish voice of yours, Max Melmer, among a thousand," said Buffalo Bill, who sat upon his trembling horse, a revolver in each hand.

"Yes, I am the man you so cleverly captured, Buffalo Bill; but now, you are in my power, for I have hundreds of my braves around you," was the reply of the white chief.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE MYSTERIOUS FRIEND.

THOUGH utterly fearless, Buffalo Bill was not foolhardy. He knew that the renegade spoke the truth, for he certainly would not be where he was without his braves in force about him. His coming had evidently been known, and on their fleet Indian ponies, the red-skins had reported his advance.

The trail was a narrow one, rocky on either side, the timber was heavy, and he could not swerve either way in the darkness. Every foot of it was known to the red-skins, and they held him at a disadvantage. The large trees protected them from his shots, even could he have seen where to fire.

In front of him, on either side, half a dozen lariats had been stretched, which completely barred his way. From tree to tree they were made fast, and, crouching in silence in the darkness, his approach had been known to them.

The moment he had ridden into the "Spider's web," lariats had been thrown across the trail behind him and made fast.

He recognized all this in an instant of thought. It was a clever trap, and he had been fairly caught. His horse had shied a little upon entering the net, and gave a snort, but the scout had supposed the trouble to be some skulking wolf.

He now knew that the wolf-hows and coyote-yelping was made by human throats, and to lead him to think just what he had, that there were no human beings near.

"Surrender, Bill, or I will give my braves the word, and they will make a cushion for arrows out of you."

"You've got me, that's a fact, you infernal renegade, so I can but submit," responded the scout.

"All right. I'll show you how you are situated," and the white renegade chief ordered a warrior to light the fire, and instantly there blazed up a bright flame, revealing to Buffalo Bill how cleverly he had been caught, and showing him the red fiends about him.

"I cave, Melmer, for you hold a hand full of trumps," said Buffalo Bill, in his indifferent way as he beheld the startling spectacle.

"Then hand to that chief every one of your



weapons, and see that they do not go off in doing so."

"You had better let me give them to you, Max," suggested Buffalo Bill, with a laugh.

"No, give them to the chief," was the stern reply.

"You gave me yours when I asked for them, Max."

"Look here, Buffalo Bill, you'll find this no joking matter," angrily retorted the renegade.

"I can't see any fun in it, that's a fact; but what are you going to do with me?"

"Take you to my village in the mountains, as soon as I have arranged another matter I have on hand."

"What is that?"

"I do not mind telling you that I have the hundred troopers, sent out from Fort Advance, in as safe a trap as I have you."

"I don't believe it."

"Sunrise will show."

"Captain Vaughan has not been captured, with his men."

"Not yet, but they will be."

"You think so; but there will be wailing before they are in your dirty camp."

"Give up your arms," impatiently ordered the renegade.

"Let your chief take them."

This the chief did, and then came the command in the Sioux tongue:

"Tie him on his horse and let him be taken to the canyon camp."

The scout was, accordingly, securely bound in his saddle, and the chief, carrying his arms, led the way, while a dozen warriors surrounded the animal as he moved along.

A ride of half a mile back along the hillside, and they came to a canyon, where a number of Indians were encamped, cooking buffalo-meat upon a few hot coals.

As though obeying an order of the renegade, the chief stepped up to a tall, splendid-looking Indian and said something to him in a tone that Buffalo Bill did not hear.

The Indian, who was a chief, glanced quickly up at the scout, replied to the one who addressed him and took the belt of arms, repeating-rifle and holster revolver of the prisoner.

The chief and his guard then departed, leaving the captive in charge of the one to whom he had given the weapons.

Turning to the braves the tall chief said in his own tongue:

"I have here a pale-face prisoner. Remain here, and I will soon return."

He seized the bridle-rein of the scout's horse, as he spoke, and led him back down the canyon.

Reaching the trail that ran near, to the amazement of the scout he said in perfect English:

"Buffalo Bill, Chief Red Heart sent you to me to guard until the morrow, and in the mean time to read the dispatches you carry. It is my intention to set you free, so see, I untie your bonds and restore you your arms. Go to the ridge trail leading to the mountains. Follow it to the Death Canyon, and go quickly. You know it, do you not?"

"I do; but who are you?"

"It matters not; but do you know the cliff trail leading from that canyon?"

"I have passed down it."

"It takes a brave man to do that, for a false step means death."

"I know that."

"In the Death Canyon you will find Captain Grayson Vaughan and one hundred cavalrymen. They penetrated the mountains, found the renegade chief and his braves had not retreated, and are lying in ambush for them."

"It is a splendid place to annihilate the Sioux, though, ten to one against the whites if his presence there is not known. But it is, and at dawn Red Heart will have twelve hundred Sioux around the troops, cut them off from all escape and massacre every man."

"Good God! then that arch-fiend was right," cried Buffalo Bill.

"He was, and if you wish to save your friends, go to the canyon by way of the cliff trail, and lead the command back that way to the mountains, and thus to the prairie, for nothing can otherwise save them."

"I thank you from my inmost heart; but tell me who you are?"

"A Sioux."

"I cannot believe it, for—"

"Go! I have warned you," and the Indian chief turned away, while Buffalo Bill replaced his arms, and hastily rode away along the trail, wondering at his strange deliverance by his mysterious friend.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### BEATEN AT THEIR OWN GAME.

THERE could have been no better place chosen for an ambush than the one in which Captain Vaughan had stationed his troops.

Death's Canyon was well known to the scouts along with the young captain, and when, after a dash into the mountains they discovered that the red-skins had not retreated to the fastnesses, it was decided to lie in wait for them on their return.

The canyon was such a place that a hundred men could hold a thousand at their mercy there, and at the same time be in little danger themselves.

But, if the ambush was known to the thousand, the canyon was an unfortunate place to those lying in wait, as their retreat could be wholly cut off.

Discovering the presence of the troopers, from his Indian scouts, the renegade at once determined to trap the trappers.

He had been foiled in his raid on the settlements, and when he had expected to surprise and capture Fort Advance, he had been beaten back with the loss of a number of braves.

To go back to his villages, with the scalps of a hundred troopers, would be a balm for his disappointment.

So he sent large bodies of braves to guard the three passes to the canyon, intending to reach an appoint of attack after dawn with five hundred braves.

Those troopers that were not killed in the attack would be shot down as they attempted to escape by the passes.

It was a well-arranged plot, and, but for the capture of Buffalo Bill and his release by his mysterious red friend, would have been successful.

The scout knew the mountain trails about there pretty well, for he had fought the red-skins along the ridge, and into the mountains years before with a regiment of gallant soldiers at his back.

He accordingly made his way to the cliff trail, and, so anxious was he to have no mistake occur, and thus not be able to warn the soldiers, he dismounted and led his horse along the perilous path.

It was a ride of half a mile, and he made it in safety, riding into the canyon and into the very midst of the troopers before his presence was suspected.

The scouts stood guard at the other passes, waiting to signal any advance of the Indians, and the horses were all muzzled, to prevent their neighing, and their riders slept near them on their blankets, every man having selected a good position before sunset.

Within a few feet of where the scout entered the canyon, Captain Vaughan was seated, talking with his officers. It was after midnight, and they knew not what moment the Indians might come along.

As the scout appeared before him in the gloom, leading his horse, the young captain sprang to his feet, for he could not mistake that tall, erect form and bearing.

"Cody, you here!"

"Yes, Captain Vaughan, and you must at once order all your men to follow me in perfect silence. Let every man lead his horse, and, for God's sake, be careful, for we will have to round the cliff on a rocky trail not three feet wide."

"But, Cody, what does it mean?"

"I can tell you nothing now, sir, and if you have confidence in me do as I say!"

"Willingly, my brave fellow," and the order was quickly passed along, for every man to at once rise, and, leading his horse, to follow the scout.

Perfect silence was enjoined, and in five minutes after the coming of the scout the column was moving.

Cody led, and next to him came Grayson Vaughan, while an officer stood at the pass to count each man as he went by, and then to bring up the rear.

Like specters they passed along; and once only a man slipped, and his shriek rung out as he was dashed down to death, on the rocks four hundred feet below.

Involuntarily the line halted, but there came the stern order from the leader:

"Come on! to halt is sure death!"

Then it was a horse that stumbled, and he was hurled to death, and his shriek of horror was as appalling as the human cry.

"Come on!" came the stern command from Buffalo Bill, as the column again hesitated.

Fearing that the cries of the horse and man might have been heard by the Indians guarding the passes, Buffalo Bill now placed his hands to his lips, and gave the human-like cry of the mountain lion. This he repeated several times, to deceive the red-skins as to the first sounds that might have reached their ears.

At last the dread cliff was passed, and the scout and his followers reached the mountain trail, having escaped from the Death Canyon, which had been the scene of many an Indian massacre.

Then in a few words Cody told Captain Vaughan of his capture and what had followed it.

All near him silently grasped his hand in a manner that expressed more than words.

"Now, Captain Vaughan, if you are willing to hit back, and will follow my lead, though I do not wish to stand in the way of your own scouts, I will show you how you can strike the red-skins a telling blow."

"You have but to say come, Cody, and we will follow you," was the ready reply.

"It is yet three hours before dawn, when the

red-skins will find out that you have gone. They will also then discover the way you escaped, and which, known to but few, and so perilous, they did not deem it necessary to guard.

"They will believe, naturally, that you braunched off just here, going down into the valley and thence to the fort, fearing with your force to attack fifteen hundred of them."

"It will take them a little time to find out you have not gone to the valley, and then some time more to get their force in motion, so you will have all of four hours' start."

"It is just thirty miles from here to the village of Red Heart, the Renegade, and he has not, I feel sure, a hundred warriors left in it."

"There are other villages within a few miles of his, it is true, but, with the force he has, he must have drawn heavily upon them, and if not, they could not catch us."

"And your idea is to strike at his village?"

"Yes, sir; to sweep along the chain of villages under Red Heart, destroy them, shoot down all braves who oppose us, spare all women and children, and run off their herds of ponies."

"Cody, you are a treasure! We will start at once, and as our horses are comparatively fresh choose your own gait."

The troopers now mounted, and, while the renegade and his braves were awaiting to attack them in the Death Canyon, they were miles away, riding rapidly toward the Indian villages.

Knowing the mountains as he did, and just where the villages were situated, Buffalo Bill held on his way, determined to strike the home of the white chief, Red Heart, first.

"Do not spare your horses, for there are plenty fresh ones in the red skin camps," Cody announced; so the rapid pace was kept up.

It was not yet dawn, when, like a whirlwind, the hundred gallant cavalymen, dashed into the Indian village.

Taken wholly by surprise as they were, the scene beggars description. Warriors were shot down, tepees were set on fire, provisions were burned, and women and children, aroused from sleep, flew to hiding-places in the mountains.

Half an hour of horror, and with the flames of the Indian village lighting their way, the troopers mounted on fresh horses, and driving along a large herd with them, swept through the mountains on their work of destruction, and as the sun arose, a second red-skin camp was ridden into and quickly destroyed.

A third soon followed, after a sharp-fought battle of a few minutes, where the braves, warned by fugitives from the other villages, made a bold stand.

Here warriors and soldiers bit the dust; but the irresistible whirlwind swept on, and passed down the mountain trail toward the plains.

Behind them were ruin and death, and with them they carried their dead and wounded, and hundreds of captured horses and Indian ponies.

"They cannot overtake you now, Captain Vaughan, and your scouts can lead you by the best trails back to the fort," said Buffalo Bill, who was now mounted upon a fine iron-gray, and led Hussar and another horse.

"And you, Cody?"

"I go on from here, sir, with my dispatches for General Custer, and I shall report your gallant work of beating the Indians at their own game."

"And tell him that it was through you it was done, Bill; but you shall be remembered in reports from Fort Advance, I assure you."

"Good-by."

The scout rode away, raising his sombrero to the cheers that rung along the line for him, and when he had disappeared in the timber, with his two extra horses following, the brave troopers once more moved on toward the fort.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### THE TWO CHIEFS.

AFTER having sent his much-prized captive to the chief who so summarily disposed of him, Red Heart the Renegade devoted himself to setting his warriors in motion.

It had been explained to them just how they were to attack the cavalry in the canyon, and that large forces of their comrades were already getting into position to cut off all escape.

Having arranged all his plans with grim satisfaction, while his red-skin braves were moving noiselessly into the positions assigned to them, Red Heart sought the temporary camp of the chief to whom he had sent Buffalo Bill.

He found that that chief had also sent his braves to their posts, and was awaiting his coming.

A fire still burned in the canyon, and the chief he visited was pacing to and fro.

"Well, Melmer, I am waiting for you, as you see," said the chief, speaking in perfect English, though the fire showed that his face was as hideously painted as any of the braves, and, if there was white blood in his veins, it was certainly not visible as he then appeared.

"So I see, major; but I am hungry, so I hope you saved me some supper?"

"Yes, there you will find some broiled buffalo-steaks and a tin cup of coffee, which I put aside for you; but have your warriors moved?"



"Yes, they are all now on the way to surround the canyon, and not a man of those troopers there will ever escape."

"But was not that a grand capture I made to-night?"

"You refer to Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes, and I shall burn him at the stake."

"I supposed that was your intention, when you sent him to me to guard for you."

"Yes, I will at last have my revenge; but where is he, major?"

"I set him free."

The renegade sprung to his feet with a cry of rage, while he hissed forth:

"You set him free?"

"Yes, Melmer."

"Do you dare tell me this?"

"Why not tell you the truth?"

"By Heaven! but you shall suffer for this in his stead."

"Do not say what you do not mean, Melmer."

"I swear it."

"Bah! we are man to man here in this canyon, and ever since you entered it I have had you covered—see!"

The renegade had not noticed before, that beneath the blanket the chief held in his lap, his hand grasped a revolver that was leveled at him, cocked, and a finger on the trigger.

"Would you kill one who has been your friend, major?" he said, in a tone of reproach.

"I saved you from the gallows, Melmer, and in return you gave me a shelter among your braves, and made me a chief; so we are quits, and I set Buffalo Bill free because I did not intend he should be tortured to death. Now if you don't wish me to remain with you, say so, and I am ready to go my way at once."

"I am afraid of you, for you might turn traitor at any time."

"You are a fine fellow to talk of *treachery*; but if you mean it is treachery in me to keep a splendid fellow like Buffalo Bill from your fiendish revenge, then I am a traitor."

"And you might do the same thing again."

"Perhaps."

"Then, major, you and I must part, for, though I have the power to cause your death, for the sake of what you saved me from, I will spare you."

"Now, Melmer, you are inveigling yourself into the thought that you are *kind* to me, whereas you are in my power, as you have not a brave within a mile, and I could kill you before you could draw a weapon. I sought shelter with you, yes, and you were glad to give it. Now I no longer seek it, so we will at once part."

"The horse you gave me was one you got from Buffalo Bill, you told me, and a splendid animal he is, though still fagged by the hard ride the scout gave him. I shall keep him to remind me that I saved his former master from your cruel hands."

"You can go now, Melmer, before you force me to kill you."

The renegade was livid with rage, yet felt that he dared make no effort to kill the man who so boldly faced him.

So he turned quickly toward his horse, sprung into his saddle, saying, savagely:

"One of these days I will hold the winning hand, and then I'll forget what mercy is."

"You never knew what it is, Max Melmer," was the retort, as the renegade rode slowly away.

Once he had left the canyon, he pressed on more rapidly, and coming to the spot where his warriors were lying in ambush, he called a chief aside and said:

"Let the Feather Foot take twelve good warriors with him to the canyon where was my camp, and capture the traitor chief who was my friend."

A moment after Feather Foot and his braves were on their way to the canyon where the renegade had left the man whom he called a traitor.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE RAIDERS' RETURN.

THERE was a double disappointment in store for Red Heart the Renegade, for the chief Featherfoot came back after an absence of two hours and reported that the one he had been sent to capture could not be found.

He had doubtless known the character of the renegade too well to tarry an instant longer than was necessary, after the departure of a man who could readily put a hundred braves upon his trail.

Which way he had gone not even the experienced eyes of Featherfoot could discover, for there were hundreds of horses' tracks in the mountains, and to pick out the trail which would be the right one, was more than even Indian cunning and skill could do.

So the band returned, and Featherfoot made his report.

He fairly lost his stoicism, when he saw the rage into which it threw the great white chief, and he was glad to withdraw from his presence.

But for the desire not to alarm the intended

victims, he deemed safely in the canyon, Red Heart would have uttered oaths both loud and deep; but as it was his suppressed rage was terrible to the Indians to witness, and they feared their white chief as they would a madman.

When the dawn began to break, the anticipation of his surprise and victory over the troopers, caused the renegade to become calm, and he issued his orders with promptness to begin the attack.

A moment after the rattle of firearms and yells of a thousand Indians, that rung in many echoes through the hills, sent the birds and wild beasts flying and running in terror.

But the gloom of the canyon, lighted up by the flashes of the rifles and revolvers of the redskins, showed that there was no enemy there.

Maddened at the sight the Indians pressed recklessly down into the canyon, to see if their eyes deceived them.

But no soldiers were visible, and no firing from the several passes, showed that the foe was certainly not retreating.

No, it was very soon found out that the enemy had gone, and, as the daylight brightened, the trail the soldiers had taken was seen.

Brave as they were the Indians cared not to take that dangerous pathway around the cliff, where the light of day would reveal what the night had hidden from the troopers' eyes.

As white as rage could make his bronzed skin, with eyes that glared ferociously, and uttering oaths that were appalling, the renegade was determined to strike a blow along the line of settlements to gain his revenge.

But just then there arrived an Indian scout, who reported that the band of cavalry had taken the trail to the mountains, and had not turned off into the valley and thus gone back to the fort.

The white chief heard how he had hidden among the rocks, within a few feet of the trail, and seen the soldiers go by at a rapid canter, directly toward the villages in the mountains.

Then he had come with all his speed to tell the Red Heart.

Words cannot depict the scene that followed, for one and all were wild with fury, and, mounting their ponies, led by the renegade, they started in full run for their villages.

Runners were sent back to bring all of the warriors who were on the war-path, and thus a straggling line of braves was stretched out for miles through the mountains.

When the renegade drew near his village he passed frightened women and children, and braves hastily told him of the work of destruction.

Arriving upon the scene, hardly three hours after the departure of the soldiers, the desolation and destruction made him gnash his teeth with rage and gnaw his lips until they bled.

Vowing vengeance, he sprung from his fagged-out horse, and called for his braves to mount fresh ponies and follow him in chase of the foe who had dealt him the same cruel blow that he had meant to deal the settlers on the plains.

But a few broken-down old ponies were all that had been left by the troopers, and the renegade chief had but to remain inactive while he listened to the tales of woe from the other villages.

By twos, sixes and scores his braves were arriving on their tired ponies, and each new arrival added to the pandemonium, and it was hours before the calm came after the storm.

Dead and wounded braves, scattered women and children, burned homes and provisions destroyed, and furs, robes and ponies carried off, remained as evidence of the terrible blow that had been struck, and which was yet merciful in comparison to the red deeds of those same savage Sioux visited each year upon the frontier settlement.

To think of revenge then was out of the question, for the dead were to be buried, the wounded cared for, tepees built, and the hunters must go forth to find food for the women and children.

But the deed should not be forgotten, and savage vows of vengeance were made against the band of gallant soldiers, who had invaded the fastnesses of the redskins, fought superior numbers, and, with their captured braves, were retreating toward the fort.

Hampered by their dead and wounded, and the large herd of horses and ponies, not to speak of the splendid robes and furs, which they had brought off by the hundred, the troopers were not able to press on very rapidly.

But they kept steadily on, halting only for food and a short rest, and soon after sunrise of the following day arrived in sight of the fort.

The "long roll" was sounded, for the sentinel at first supposed that each one of the large herd of ponies held an Indian warrior; but when the troopers were seen cheers rung out to welcome them, and as Grayson Vaughan, utterly worn out, slipped slowly from his saddle to the ground, the welcome that he got made his heart glad; but disclaiming the credit himself, he said over and over again:

"I owe it to Buffalo Bill, for but for him none of us would be here to tell the tale," and Grayson Vaughan told the story of his escape from Death Canyon, as the reader knows it.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE MYSTERIOUS SOLDIER.

THE great number of horses captured by the squadron under Captain Vaughan, was more than could be cared for at Fort Advance, and the following day fresh troopers were sent off with two-thirds of them to distribute at the different outposts, where it was known that they were needed, while others were given out in the settlements.

The achievement of his gallant adjutant, Colonel Yulee, would bring greater fame upon Fort Advance, and he wrote full reports of the affair to General Custer, not forgetting to give Buffalo Bill also full praise, and stating that he was very certain it would be many months before the redskins would be in condition to make another marauding expedition.

The second night after the return of the troopers from their attack upon the red-skin villages, came in with a driving rain-storm.

The winds were chilly and blew in savage gusts around the fort, causing the cattle to seek shelter, and the sentinels to shrink back in their sentry-boxes.

The night was intensely dark, and as no danger from the Indians was just then feared, the sentinel on duty at the gate was making himself as comfortable as possible in his confined quarters, muffled up in his great-coat and congratulating himself that he had such a shelter.

So wrapped up was he in his own meditations, that he failed to notice a dark form come across the prairie, reach the fort wall and creep around it toward where he stood.

The form was tall, clad in uniform, and had his hat drawn down far over his eyes.

Suddenly the sentinel found himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver and heard the stern words:

"Make an outcry and I will kill you; but submit quietly and I mean you no harm."

The sentinel was terribly alarmed, and yet he dared make no outcry.

"Turn around, sir, and take off your coat!"

He obeyed the stern command promptly.

"Put your hands behind you, sir!"

This order was obeyed, and, with a skill and quickness that was surprising, the hands were bound and then the feet.

"Now, my man, I will have to gag you and then borrow your overcoat for a few moments, while I enter the fort."

"I mean no harm to you, or to any one there, so rest easy on that score."

"I will return in half an hour, and then you shall resume your duty as sentinel."

The strange man then drew on the heavy coat of the sentinel, turned up the collar, and drawing his hat far down over his eyes, strode boldly into the fort.

He passed near the guard-house and met one or two forms enveloped in storm coats, but no one took particular notice of him, and he passed in among the cabins.

There was music in one cabin, singing in another, and loud laughter and talking in another, and not one dreamed how boldly the fort had been entered by a mysterious individual clad in uniform.

The minutes went by until half an hour passed, and then the form reappeared, and he seemed to be carrying a burden.

Now he seemed more anxious to avoid observation than when he entered, and kept out of the beaten path near the fort wall.

He gave the guard-house a wide berth, and then made his way back to the sentinel he had left so securely bound and gagged.

"My man, I am back again, and I have seen no one that I have spoken to, and I will let you off easily, for you can tell or not, as you please, that I found you keeping such poor watch on your post that I surprised and captured you. Rain or shine, day or night, I advise you to keep a closer watch, or you will lose your scalp. Here is your coat, for I do not need it now, and I am obliged for its loan. I will also unbind you, but if you attempt any trickery I will shoot you."

"I'll not move, sir, indade I'll not be afther br'athin' at all."

"You'll stop breathing if you give an alarm, and, as I told you, keep the secret to yourself of my coming."

"Sure, and is nobody afther knowin', sir?"

"Not one."

"And what are you afther having there, sir?"

"That is none of your business."

"It is big enough to be a dead body, sir."

"It may be," was the startling reply, and the Irish soldier shuddered.

"Here is your gun, but, mind you, don't use it unless you wish to die."

"The saints preserve me, sir, I'm afther livin' all I can, sir."

The strange soldier now threw the large bundle that he carried over his shoulders and walked briskly away, leaving the sentinel in an unpleasant frame of mind that would keep him alert until he was relieved from duty.

After keeping in the shadow of the fort, as he had come, the mysterious stranger glided off over the prairie, and after a walk of a few hundred feet, came to a horse staked out, and



standing with drooping head in the still driving rain.

Mounting, and holding his bundle in front of him, he rode on for several miles, until he came to a high hill that was heavily wooded.

As though knowing the way thoroughly, he pressed on into the timber, turned into a small canyon, and soon drew rein beneath a mass of overhanging rocks, which sheltered him entirely from the rain.

A number of scrub-pines grew close in under the rocks, and the ground was soft with the straw that had fallen from them.

Laying his bundle down, a match was lighted, a fire quickly built of dry brushwood and logs, for plenty were near, and the bright blaze revealed a snug camping-place.

Placing some large logs on the fire that would last for the night, the first care of the man was for his horse, which was fastened in a snug nook out of the reach of the rain, while the saddle and bridle were taken off and placed near the fire.

The large bundle was then opened and revealed blankets, clothing, a cloak, oil blankets and some fire-arms, along with a smaller package which was not disturbed.

The man quickly spread his blankets, divested himself of his wet garments and replaced them with dry ones, hanging the others before the fire.

Those that he had taken off and those he put on were uniforms, and the whole bearing of the man proved that he was a soldier.

Having made himself comfortable, the mysterious soldier looked carefully at his fire-arms, and then sat for some time gazing into the blazing fire.

At last, with a deep sigh, he arose, threw himself down upon his rude couch, and, unmindful of the furious storm, went to sleep as peacefully as a child.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A SECRET DETECTIVE.

WHEN Buffalo Bill returned to the garrison, where General Custer held command, those who saw his approach were convinced that he had been unable to make the perilous ride to Fort Advance and had therefore been forced to come back.

It was seen that he had three horses with him instead of two that he had started with, and, as he came nearer some one observed that not one of the three animals had he carried with him.

The scouts, over whom Buffalo Bill held command, were more deeply interested in his return, for they had one and all declined to go.

Had it been possible for him to reach Fort Advance, they wondered?

No, that was impossible, for he had only been gone four days.

And so they watched his coming and speculated on what he had done, while some ungenerous spirits, for their own sakes, hoped he had not met with success.

"Ho, Chief Cody, did you get through?" called out a scout, as he came within hail.

"Yes, Jack."

"You got to Fort Advance?"

"I did."

Three cheers at once rung out for the brave scout, and they brought General Custer to the door of his quarters.

"Bravo, Bill, back again so soon?" he cried.

"Yes, sir."

"And what luck?" and the general hardly dared ask the question, so fearful was he that Buffalo Bill had not gone through.

"I have dispatches for you, sir, from Colonel Yulee," was the response.

"I knew you would do it, Bill, if it could be done."

"Give me your hand, and sit down and tell me all about your trip."

"But you have made wonderful time there and back."

"I did not tarry much on the road, general; but I was an instant too late to save the poor sergeant."

"An instant, you say?"

"Yes, sir, for as I dashed up the order was given to fire."

"I called out that I had his pardon, but several of the men unintentionally drew trigger, and he fell under the fire."

"Poor fellow."

"I did my best, general."

"I know, I feel that; but let me glance at these dispatches and then tell me of your trip, for, from reports coming in, I know that the red-skins are all along the border, and that arch-renege, Red Heart, is leading them."

"Ah! if I could catch that fellow, it would be a sorry day for him."

Buffalo Bill thought so too; but he waited until General Custer had read the dispatches and again turned to him.

"Bill, you have made a wonderful record since you left here four days ago, and now that you are safely back again I am glad that you went."

"Now tell me, from beginning to end, all about your desperate ride."

The scout obeyed, and when he had finished his story, General Custer sent for some of the

officers of his command, and had him repeat the story, which he did in the modest way natural to him when speaking of his own exploits.

"Bill, you would win the command of a regiment, if it were not that you cannot be spared as chief of scouts, in which capacity you serve the army as no other man has or can, in the same position; but here I am keeping you up, when you are haggard from the want of rest and sleep, so go to your quarters, and you need not report for duty for two days," and Buffalo Bill was very glad to seek the rest he needed, for even his iron frame had begun to feel the terrible strain he had been forced to undergo.

As the days went by the scouts brought in word that the severe punishment given the Indians by the troops from Fort Advance had caused them to return to their fastnesses, from which they would doubtless not come forth for months.

It was some weeks after Buffalo Bill's memorable ride to Fort Advance that he was sent for to come at once to the general's quarters.

"Cody, I have here some dispatches from Colonel Yulee, and, after telling me that the frontier is comparatively quiet, as regards marauding bands of Indians, he goes on to state that he has a new evil to deal with."

"A new evil, sir?"

"Yes, and it is in the shape of road-agents, a band of whom infest the half-dozen stage-trails going west."

"First they are upon one trail, then on another, and though he has sent half a dozen different commands out upon the search, they have not been able to find the outlaws, or where their camp is."

"Colonel Yulee has some excellent scouts, general, and they should be able to place them," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, and yet the mountain country is very wild there, and there are now some seven stage-lines running to different points, with considerable distance to travel, and the advantage is all for the road-agents, and, not having been able to put a check upon them, the colonel writes me a special letter to allow you to go and undertake the work."

"It will make a detective of you for the while, Cody, and if you consent I will give you the papers as a special officer of the Government Secret Service; but of course it rests with you to say whether you will do so or not, as I will not order you on duty outside of your legitimate calling."

After a moment of thought, the scout said, slowly:

"I will undertake the work, general."

"When shall I start?"

"As soon as you are ready."

"I will be ready, sir, within the hour, and Texas Jack can take my place as Chief of Scouts while I am gone."

An hour after, Buffalo Bill rode away on his secret mission.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE MASKED HUSSARS.

WHEN Buffalo Bill left upon his ride to Fort Advance, he went well prepared for a lengthy stay, if it became necessary.

He rode his fine horse Hussar, and carried with him the two other animals, and good ones they were, taken on the raid upon the Indian village of which Red Heart, the renegade, was the chief.

One of the horses was used as a pack-animal, and the other trotted along by his side, free from saddle or bridle, and both were so well trained that they followed without being led.

There was no need for pushing on rapidly, and toward the evening of the second day out, the scout was looking for a good camping-place, when he spied far off upon the prairie a party of horsemen.

They were coming toward him, and he at once leveled his field-glass, which he always kept with him, expecting that he would find them a band of marauding red-skins.

It was yet twenty-five miles to Fort Advance, and if it came to a chase he knew his horses were good for the distance, as he had not fagged them, while his repeating-rifle would put him on more even terms with the enemy.

"They are soldiers," he said, as he leveled his glass, and so he went on without further thought regarding them, to a good camping-place on the banks of a small stream not far distant.

Arriving there he dismounted, and was about to stake out his horses, when he saw that the soldiers were coming toward him at a rapid gallop.

Thinking they were from Fort Advance, and that they might need his services for some reason, he decided to wait their arrival before stripping his horses, though he went on with the work of collecting wood for a fire.

He was returning with a heavy log on one shoulder, and a bundle of brush under the other, when up dashed the soldiers, and, sweeping around him with remarkable precision, he found himself in a circle, and twelve revolvers leveled at his head.

"You are a prisoner, sir!"

The scout was fairly caught, for he had ex-

pected no trouble from men in uniform; but now he discovered that these twelve horsemen were not exactly uniformed as was the United States Cavalry.

They all were mounted upon black horses, and the bridles and saddles were military.

Their uniform was of army blue, the pants worn in top-boots, heavily spurred, they carried sabers, holster-pistols and revolvers in their belts.

They wore jackets trimmed with yellow, and gauntlet-gloves covered their hands.

But that which surprised the scout most was that upon their heads were brass helmets, with the visor down, so that their faces were completely concealed, a cape of woven wire falling from the lower edge of the helmet upon the shoulders, wholly concealing the neck.

"Well, pards, has there been a mask ball in these parts?" said Buffalo Bill, dropping his load of wood and gazing with curiosity upon the twelve masked horsemen.

"You are my prisoner, sir, so hand over your weapons, mount your horse and go with us," said the one who had before spoken.

"May I ask who you are, sir, and to what command you belong?" said the scout, coolly.

"We are the Masked Hussars, sir."

"You look it; but to what command do you belong in the army?"

"We do not belong to the United States Army."

"Oh! a militia company among the settlers, out on a scouting expedition against the red-skins, and wearing those brass kettles on your heads to keep from being scalped?"

"We belong to no militia, sir, we are the Masked Hussars; in other words pirates of the prairies, and you are our game."

"I see; road-agents?"

And not a muscle of the scout's face changed.

"Yes."

"And what do you intend to do with me?"

"That is for our chief to say."

"Ah! you are not the captain, then?"

"I am not."

"Who is?"

"Major Mephisto."

"I have not had a college education, pard, but is Mephisto a polite name for the devil?"

"About that," and the Hussar laughed.

"Then I cave, so take me along with you," was the response.

The horses of the scout were then brought up, he was disarmed, and mounting, he was placed between the one who had held the conversation with him and another of the band.

Not another had spoken a word even when ordered by their leader.

The two extra horses of the scout trotted close behind him, and following came the other ten Masked Hussars.

In perfect silence they rode away over the prairie through the gathering twilight, and all efforts on the part of Buffalo Bill to draw his captors into conversation were utterly useless.

He saw that they were heading toward the mountains, and not in the direction of Fort Advance, leaving it on the right.

What they would do with him he could not imagine.

He had been the bitter foe of the road-agents in the past, on the Overland trails, and had broken up several of their bands, and he knew that he was bitterly hated by them.

But this was a party he had never heard of, and they certainly appeared to turn out in style.

They had captured him in a very neat way, and, as he rode along, it came to him that his mission in coming to the far frontier had been to find the mysterious road-agents of whom Colonel Yulee had written.

"Oh, I've found them," he said to himself with a laugh.

Then, as the two men riding with him refused to answer any questions, or to speak upon any subject, he said in his off-hand way:

"You are about as pleasant company as a gang of ghosts."

One of his captors laughed lightly, but uttered no word, and they pressed on as before.

After a ride of a couple of hours they entered the foot-hills and halting, the scout was bound and securely blindfolded. Following an ascending trail they came to a dense thicket of pines.

Penetrating into the midst of the thicket, by a narrow trail, that forced them to go in single file, they soon came to a glimmer ahead and a cabin was visible in a small clearing, the trees that had been cut down having been so placed as to form a barrier.

The trail they were on seemed to be the only entrance to the little clearing, which was half an acre in size.

A fire burned before the cabin door, and beside it was a man cooking supper.

He wore the uniform and helmet of the Masked Hussars.

As they rode up to the door of the cabin a man appeared who was also in uniform and helmet mask; but gold braid instead of worsted adorned his jacket, and his whole appearance was on a grander scale than the others.

"Well, captain, what luck?" asked the one who stood in the cabin door.



The one he addressed was he who had been the spokesman in the conversation held with the scout, and his rank of captain was doubtless marked by a skull and cross-bones in gold thread on his left sleeve.

The one who had ridden on the left of the scout had the same device upon his sleeve, only worked in silver thread.

"I have a prisoner here, Major Mephisto, who says he is known as Buffalo Bill," was the reply of the "captain."

"What! Buffalo Bill your prisoner?" cried Major Mephisto, stepping quickly from the cabin and advancing to the side of the scout, who had not been seen by him before, as he was hidden by the Masked Hussars who surrounded him.

## CHAPTER XX.

### FOR UNKNOWN REASONS.

WHEN the man who had been called Major Mephisto advanced to the side of Buffalo Bill, he glanced up into his face and asked:

"Are you he whom men call Buffalo Bill?"

"I am."

"You are Chief of Scouts, under General Custer?"

"Yes."

"When did you leave General Custer?"

"Two nights ago."

"Where were you going when my Hussars captured you?"

"To Fort Advance."

"With dispatches?"

"Yes," answered the scout, knowing the utter uselessness of denying anything that by searching him they could find out.

"Will you return then to General Custer?"

"I cannot tell, for I may be sent to the line of outposts with dispatches."

"How was it that you were captured by my Hussars?"

"I saw them off on the prairie, as I was going into camp for the night, supposed they were honest soldiers, and when they rode up they caught me with my arms full of wood, for I suspected no treachery."

"Had I known what they were before they got near me, I think I should have let them fight if they wanted me."

"I am sure that you would, from all I have heard of you; but I am not going to detain you, Buffalo Bill."

"Does that mean that I can go?"

"Yes, after you have had supper, which is about ready."

So saying the chief stepped forward and took the bandage from the scout's eyes, and the bonds from his hands.

"You are the king bee, sure enough," said Buffalo Bill, as he saw the elegant make-up of Major Mephisto, and he added:

"I supposed that pilgrim you called captain was lying to me when he said he was not the chief."

"No, I am chief here; but come, have your supper, and then my men will blindfold you again and carry you out upon the prairie, when you will be free."

"May I ask why you allow me to go?"

"For reasons of my own which I cannot explain."

"All right, major, I am not curious, as long as I can go; but I would like to offer you a piece of advice."

"Well, sir?"

"Give up robbing on the road and take to an honest calling, for sooner or later you will get roped."

"I will take my chances; but supper is ready, so join me, please."

They entered the cabin, which was large and evidently the abode of all the men, for a number of bunks were along the wall.

The table was neatly set, with clean cloth, and the tinware shone like silver.

The man who was cooking served the dishes, and the scout enjoyed the meal with Major Mephisto, no one else sitting down.

The scout was in hopes he would raise the visor of his helmet, but he only did so to the mouth, revealing the firm chin alone.

The supper was a remarkably good one for camp, and the scout enjoyed it, and was then offered a good cigar by his outlaw guest.

Then Buffalo Bill signified a willingness to depart, and mounting his horse he was blindfolded, bound, and, accompanied by six of the Hussars as a guard, he left the cabin in the thicket.

If any of the Hussars had been inclined to talk to the scout, he did not give them a chance, for he remained perfectly silent.

But his thoughts were busy, and he counted every footfall of his horse, so that he could get an idea of the distance to the cabin from where he would be released.

After leaving the hills and a ride of an hour upon the prairie, the scout was brought to a halt, the bandage was removed from his eyes, his arms were freed, the led horses turned loose, and, without a word, his guard rode away.

"Good-night, gentlemen, and thank you," called out the scout.

But no response was returned, and the Hussars rode on.

After gazing at them for a little while, the scout looked up to the stars, took his bearings, and then, as he moved away followed by his other horses he said:

"Now those pilgrims think they are fooling me nicely, while I know they are riding away from and not toward their cabin."

"They meandered about this prairie in the space of a quarter of a mile to make me believe they were taking me quite a distance away from the hills; but I wasn't fooled worth a cent."

"I counted the steps from the cabin until we struck level ground, and I will be able to find that little cabin again, and I shall do so, only I will take company with me."

"That Major Mephisto is the most gentlemanly outlaw I ever met, and I am indebted to him for getting out of a bad scrape."

"But I'll have to hunt him down all the same, as that is my business now."

"Come, Hussar, we have gotten away from your namesakes, and the fort lies about yonder, and we'll go on there to-night I guess," and the scout turned the head of his horse in the direction that he knew Fort Advance lay, just as the six Hussars who had been his guard, believing they were out of sight, turned back toward their retreat.

But the scout had his glass upon them, and he laughed as he saw them going back to the cabin, thinking that they were out of his sight.

"These glass eyes are a great thing," the scout said with a chuckle, as he replaced the field-glass in its case and moved more briskly on over the prairie, for he wished to reach the fort by sunrise.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE SECRET MISSION.

THE sun was just peeping over the prairie, as Buffalo Bill came in full view of Fort Advance.

The Stars and Stripes went fluttering up to the top of the flagstaff, and was saluted with the morning gun, the puff of white smoke coming along on the breeze toward the scout, as though to give him welcome.

As he drew nearer and was recognized, the soldiers began to cheer him, and the first one to grasp his hand was Captain Grayson Vaughan.

"I am glad to see you, Cody, and the colonel will be too, for he has been expecting you."

"Come to his quarters at once," said the handsome young officer, and he led the scout to headquarters, where Colonel Yulee gave him a warm welcome.

"Just in time for breakfast, Cody, so go in my spare room yonder and brush up, and then we will hear all the news."

The scout gave the colonel the dispatches he had for him, and soon came out feeling quite fresh after his night ride.

Colonel Yulee glanced over the dispatches, and as the three sat down to breakfast, for Captain Vaughan messed with his commander, he said:

"Well, Cody, I am very glad that General Custer was able to spare you, and that you were willing to come."

"Yes, colonel, I could not but come and serve you, if it is in my power to do so; but what seems to be the trouble, sir?"

"Road-agents."

"I expected they would begin to get in their fine work as soon as the stages began to run through this country, for some travelers carry valuable pickings."

"Yes, but these knights of the road are a peculiar set, and their chief work is against the army."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, and they call themselves the Masked Hussars, wearing a uniform and brass helmets."

"How many there are, I have been unable to find out, but they appear upon the various Overland trails, at the most unlooked-for places and unexpected times, and they are certainly under the leadership of a bold, daring and skillful man."

"Have they done much damage, sir?"

"Well, they have captured a paymaster, who had some ten thousand in money with him, and then let him go without robbing him, strange to say; but they took from one stage a courier, who was returning to the fort after a short leave, and deliberately, in the view of all the passengers in the stage, they led him out for execution and boldly shot him."

"This is becoming serious, colonel."

"Yes, Cody, for, as I said, their enmity seems to be especially against the army."

"It is to have you find out their haunts, their force, and the best way to attack them, that I asked you of the general, and I feel that if any man can do so, you are the one."

"Thank you, sir; but did they give no reason for their execution of this soldier?"

"None, other than that the leader made him bare his left arm, and then he looked at it carefully."

"Then he said:

"'This man must die,' and he detailed twelve men to fire upon him, and they did their work well."

"Was there any mark upon the unfortunate man's arm?"

"That we do not know, for the Masked Hussars carried him off for burial, and the stage driver told Captain Vaughan of the affair as it occurred."

"It is strange, colonel, very strange," said the scout.

"You can think of no solution of it?"

"It looks to me, sir, like a clear case of revenge."

"So it seems to me, Cody."

"Were other soldiers stopped by these Hussars?"

"Yes, several of them."

"Any man now in camp?"

"Yes, two."

"Will you send for them, colonel?"

Captain Vaughan called the orderly, and the two men soon appeared.

"Mr. Cody wishes to ask you a few questions, men," said the colonel.

They saluted and turned to the scout, who asked:

"Were you stopped on the Overland by the road-agents calling themselves the Masked Hussars?"

"I was, sir."

"Yis, sur," were the replies.

"Were you together at the time?"

The men answered in the negative.

"Where were you stopped by the Hussars, my man?" asked the scout of one of them.

"I was returning from a furlough, sir, and rode on the stage up on the box with the driver."

"The Hussars suddenly surrounded us, riding splendidly, and not uttering a word."

"The leader then rode up to the coach and glanced in, and then up at me."

"Get down," he said to me.

"I obeyed, and he told me to take off my coat."

"I did so, and then he made me roll up the left sleeve of my shirt, and he glanced calmly at it."

"Then he said:

"'Mount the box again, and consider yourself in luck."

"Drive on."

"That was all?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you, my man?"

"I was after bein' a courier, sur, an' I rid right inter ther plagued varmint."

"Halt!" says they.

"Halt it is," says I.

"Thin, sur, they made me do that same as Corporal Varney did, roll up my sleeve, and ther captain loked at it very swately."

"Thin, says he:

"'You're after bein' in great luck, my darlin'."

"Says I:

"'Thank your Riverince."

"Thin he tells me to go, and I wint."

"All right, my man; thank you."

The soldiers left the quarters and Colonel Yulee said:

"Well, Cody?"

"They do not seem to be robbers, colonel."

"That is so."

"It is my opinion, as I said, that it is a case of revenge."

"It looks so; but I cannot permit this halting of coaches and interfering with soldiers, and you will try and solve the mystery?"

"Yes, sir; but I have already met these Hussars, and I know where I can find their retreat," and Buffalo Bill told of his experience with Major Mephisto, and the colonel and Captain Vaughan listened with the greatest surprise.

"And you will not let his act toward you, Cody, influence you as to your going on the trail of these men?"

"No, indeed, colonel, for their acts are lawless, halting people and, as you said, executing one man, and I will be ready, sir, whenever you say to strike their trail," was the determined response of Buffalo Bill.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### ON THE HUSSARS' TRAIL.

WHEN it was decided that he should begin to run down the human game, Buffalo Bill was anxious to get to work, and he arranged with Captain Vaughan to meet him with twenty good troopers at a point known to one of the fort scouts who would guide them to the place.

Having decided upon this, the scout went to his quarters to get several hours' sleep, and after dinner he rode away at a gallop mounted upon one of Colonel Yulee's horses, for he wished to give his own a needed rest.

Straight as the crow flies he went to the spot where he had been left by the Hussar guard the night before, and almost instantly found the trail of his horses and that of the animals ridden by the silent men who had been his escort.

With unerring skill he followed the winding path to the foothills and then up to the pine



thicket, until he came, just at sunset, to the narrow opening which led to the cabin.

Many a man, and Indians at that, would have lost the trail when it came to the thick pine straw that strewed the ground where no track could be made.

But Buffalo Bill had won a reputation as a phenomenal trailer, and he now showed that he had deserved it, for he sat looking about him for some time, his eyes resting upon every object near, and then he dismounted and searched the ground most carefully.

At last, as though satisfied, he moved on, and thus it was that he came unerringly to the place where the Hussars had turned off into the thicket.

There was nothing to mark it as the diverging point that an ordinary eye would have noted, but Buffalo Bill's vision quickly sighted what he felt were two landmarks.

One was a tree uprooted by the wind, the other was a tall pine which had been struck by lightning long before.

Passing between these two he soon saw that the thicket became very dense, and narrowed to a small space was the trail leading to the cabin.

It was, as I have said, just sunset when he reached the point where he was sure he was right, and he then hastened back as he had come, and rode rapidly out upon the prairie to the spot, a small timber motte, where he had appointed the meeting with Captain Vaughan and his troopers.

They were already there, and Captain Vaughan sat talking with Captain Talbot, who had volunteered to come with him, Surgeon Frank Powell, and the two fort scouts, when Buffalo Bill suddenly stepped up to their side.

"Cody! we were just talking of you; but I did not hear the picket challenge you," said Grayson Vaughan.

"They did not challenge me, sir, because I slipped in between them."

"I noted Indian trails on the prairie this afternoon, so was not sure but that some might be here, so I staked my horse out and came afoot."

"I saw the pickets, but it was too dark to see if they were Indians or soldiers, so I came in between them."

"You are a mysterious fellow, Cody; but now you have come let us have supper and then what is to be done?"

"Move on the enemy, sir."

"You have found their retreat, then?"

"Yes, sir, or rather the trail that will lead to it."

"And yet you were blindfolded when you were taken there and brought back?"

"I was not blindfolded to-day, captain," said the scout with a smile.

"So it seems; but dare we light a fire?"

"What do you say, Hawk-Eye Harry?" and Buffalo Bill turned to one of the fort scouts, a handsome young fellow, who had won his name from his remarkably keen eyesight.

"I would say cold grub, Buffalo Bill," was the reply of the young scout, who seemed pleased that he had been asked.

"And you, Poker Paul?" asked Buffalo Bill of the other scout, who had the reputation of being the champion poker-player, Indian-fighter and shot at Fort Advance, and was as fine a fellow as he was daring.

"Cold vittals suits me better than hot lead does, and as you says, Bill, thar may be some reds prowlin' round ter take a draw on us."

"Then we will eat a cold supper and then start," said Captain Vaughan.

"What is your exact force, captain?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Well, I have sixteen men, a sergeant, corporal, and our two scouts."

"Then there are Captain Talbot, Surgeon Powell, you and I, and Boss, my negro cook, twenty-five all told."

"About two to one, if I saw all their force, and enough to whip them if they equal us in numbers," the scout replied.

The men then were given their supper of cold venison and bread, after which the order was given to mount.

Buffalo Bill and Captain Vaughan led, the fort scouts came next, then Surgeon Powell and Captain Talbot, followed by the troopers, and with Boss bringing up the rear with two pack-horses, for it was not known how long the party would be away from the fort, and Captain Vaughan always went prepared, never caring to get out of rations or go without shelter where it could be avoided.

#### CHAPTER XXIII.

##### A STARTLING SCENE.

BETWEEN the fort scouts there was not the slightest rivalry felt toward Buffalo Bill.

One and all of them looked upon him as "the man of the border."

Whatever they might think of their own prowess and skill, they yielded without a murmur to what they knew was his superior judgment.

Had it become a question between Colonel Yulee and Buffalo Bill as to what was best to be done in a case, the fort scouts would have sided with Cody.

So it was that Hawk-Eye Harry and Poker Paul were glad to have been selected for the expedition with the renowned plainsman.

He was their beau ideal of what a borderman should be, and his handsome face, splendid form and generous nature made him one to admire and long to have as a friend.

Many a poor scout had been helped by his ready hand, and it was well known that Buffalo Bill would risk his life as quickly to serve an ordinary scout in deadly peril as he would for a general.

"Pard, Bill Cody knows jist what he are about," said Poker Paul to Hawk-Eye Harry, as the two rode along together.

"He does fer a fact, Paul, and you bet the colonel did a wise thing when he sent him to hunt down the Masked Hussars."

"Here we have been, with a dozen good men, trying to catch on to them for a month and more, and up comes Bill, and his good fortune sticks to him, for he's going right to where they hang out now," replied Hawk-Eye Harry.

"I'm glad I'm along, pard."

"So am I, Poker Paul."

"We've got the figh in'est crowd I ever seen this time, fer every man of the troopers Capt'in Vaughan picked out; you know what the sergeant and corporal is; Capt'in Talbot would rather fight than cat, and Surgeon Powell are ther match fer any man I ever seen, and deserves ther name o' ther Fightin' Doctor."

"You are right, Paul, and there is Captain Vaughan himself who is a dandy in a fight, Buffalo Bill is a whole team and we ourselves are no slouches when it comes to that."

"Yes, Hawk-Eye, we is well primed, and when we tackles the enemy fur will fly quite peert."

This conversation between the two fort scouts shows the feeling existing toward Buffalo Bill, and also the confidence they had in their officers and comrades, not forgetting themselves.

Reaching the foothills Buffalo Bill made a flank movement, knowing that he would strike the trail leading into the pine thicket.

"But you go out of your way, do you not?" said Captain Vaughan.

"Yes, sir, but if I was seen this afternoon, a pleasant little surprise-party might await us in the way of an ambush."

"Always right, Bill, so go ahead."

So well did he calculate that he came out at a point which was within a few rods of the lightning-riven tree, as a short search soon revealed.

The troopers now got their weapons ready, the order was single file, and giving the rein to his horse, the scout knew he would take him where he had been in the afternoon.

As they neared the cabin a voice was heard in song, singing the old ballad of the Texan Ranger.

The line halted and listened, and then, as they moved forward once more, there suddenly came a flash and report, and a bullet whizzed by the head of Buffalo Bill.

"Forward!" cried the scout, and he spurred forward, followed by the troopers, with a cheer.

A shout of warning was then heard ahead, and as the horsemen reached the clearing the door of the cabin opened wide and a man darted within, when it was closed once more.

But, within that instant the door was open, the attacking party caught sight of a dozen forms in the cabin.

Again the troopers cheered, as they divided in two single columns, and dashed around the cabin, completely surrounding it in a moment of time.

But the cheer of the troopers, who felt sure of their prey, was answered from within by defiant cries, and then all was silent.

"Ho, pards, you are caught in your trap, so down with your weapons and march out, if you wish quarter shown you," called out Buffalo Bill, whom Captain Vaughan had told to demand the surrender of the Hussars.

No answer came to the summons, and again the scout cried:

"Come, men, open your door before we break it in."

Still a deathlike silence followed his words.

"I will order the men in front to fire through the door," said Captain Vaughan.

"It may loosen the tongues of some of them, sir, by stilling the tongues of others," replied the scout.

"Six of you men ride closer to the cabin and at the word fire into the door."

The men obeyed, and then Captain Vaughan commanded:

"Fire!"

The carbines flashed at the command, and the bullets went tearing into the heavy wooden door.

Still no response came.

"Ho within! I shall fire again if you do not reply!" cried Captain Vaughan.

But no answer came.

"If we could get a heavy log, captain, we could break the door in," said Buffalo Bill.

Hawk-Eye Harry and four troopers were sent in search of a log, while the rest kept their places around the cabin.

"They are up to some game I cannot solve," said Buffalo Bill.

"Nor I," answered Captain Talbot.

"They have got some trap laid for us, I think," Surgeon Powell remarked.

"Ha! see that light," cried Buffalo Bill, and a red glare was visible through small crevices in the logs.

"The cabin is on fire," said Surgeon Frank Powell, as a small flame shot out between the walls and the roof.

"Now they will be forced out, so, sergeant, call the men back."

The sergeant placed a bugle to his lips, for he was acting as bugler, and blew the recall, which Hawk-Eye Harry answered from a distance with a shout, and soon after they came back at a run.

The flames were now eating along the edge of the roof within, and had broken out in several places.

But still those within made no sign or sound.

The attacking party now sat upon their horses, completely surrounding the cabin, and ready to capture the outlaws as they came out.

"Ho, men! will you not come out now?" demanded Grayson Vaughan.

But no answer came.

"Do you think they could have escaped?" asked Captain Talbot.

"Impossible, for as the door closed our column divided and surrounded the house," replied Surgeon Powell.

Again the scout demanded in thunder tones for the outlaws to come out, but no reply was vouchsafed him.

The troopers were now becoming very nervous.

They were ready to fight double or treble their number and never flinch, and yet that cabin on fire and men within it, seeming rather to die in the flames than surrender, made them very nervous.

The flames were now rapidly gaining headway, and in several places fiery tongues had eaten their way through the roof.

Then Buffalo Bill, springing from his horse, ran toward one end of the cabin.

He remembered to have seen several large stones there, used as rests for large logs on the fire, and seizing one he dashed it against the door.

There was a loud crash, but the stone rebounded.

Again the heavy boards cracked and the cabin seemed to shake under the heavy blow.

But still the door remained firm.

The chain of men around the cabin now closed in a little nearer, and all eyes were turned upon Buffalo Bill as for the third time he raised the massive stone.

It was hot, almost blistering his hands, and its weight was such that only a strong man could lift it.

But, with a gigantic effort, and a run, to give it more force, Buffalo Bill hurled the stone once more.

There followed a terrific crash, the stone went inward, carrying the door with it, wrenched from its hinges, and the whole interior of the cabin seemed on fire.

Then, without an instant's hesitation Buffalo Bill bounded into the burning cabin, a revolver in each hand as he sprang across the threshold.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### A MYSTERY SOLVED.

WHEN Buffalo Bill bounded into the burning cabin, a cry of horror arose from nearly every man that beheld his bold act. It seemed as if he was rushing to certain destruction, for the flames appeared to dart about him as though they would consume him, and the burning roof looked like it was tottering and falling.

Besides these dangers, the fact that it was the retreat of the Hussars, who, too desperate to surrender, preferred to die thus in the flames of their burning cabin, would be only too willing to drag the daring scout with them, caused Captain Vaughan to feel that Buffalo Bill would fall a victim to his own recklessness and daring.

With this feeling the young captain bounded from his horse and rushed after the scout, Surgeon Powell being close by his side, and Captain Talbot and the others following close upon their heels.

They soon beheld the brave scout back slowly out of the cabin, unharmed by the flames, though the increasing heat had forced him to retreat.

"Captain Vaughan, the outlaws are not in that cabin, sir," said Cody.

"Not in there? Why they must be there!"

"So I thought, sir, but they are not there."

"But we saw them there when the door was opened as one ran in."

"True, captain, but they are not there now."

"How in Heaven's name could they get out?"

"Ah, that is the mysterious part of it, captain."

"And where are they? May they not be concealed somewhere in it?"

"I saw the entire cabin, sir—every nook and piece of furniture in it, and there is no place



of concealment unless—"and Buffalo Bill hesitated.

"Unless what?"

"Unless there is a cellar to the house, and they are there."

"Then they must have set fire to the house intentionally?"

"Doubtless, sir."

"But will they not smother in the cellar, Cody, with such an oven over them?"

"That we will have to wait and see, sir."

"Stay here all night, you mean?"

"Yes, sir, for we will then be able to discover what the morning will reveal."

The cabin was now all in flames, and the men were forced to retreat to the end of the inclosure and there watch it.

Then the order was given to stake the horses out, leaving the saddles and bridles on them, and each man to spread his blanket near his horse.

A guard of two soldiers and the fort scouts were detailed as pickets, and one of the latter and two of the former at once went on duty, and were to call the relief in two hours, for it was after midnight.

Then the camp seemed to sleep, leaving the cabin still burning.

But the first glimmer of dawn aroused Buffalo Bill, and he began to inspect the smoldering ruin of the cabin.

The coals were yet too hot to investigate for a cellar, and so the scout beckoned to Hawk-Eye Harry and Poker Paul, and the three set off on a tour of inspection.

Having gotten outside of the timber wall, Buffalo Bill said:

"Pard Paul, you take a circuit here, about a hundred feet from the wall, and see if you can find any underground opening that might connect with the cabin."

"All right, pard."

"You, Pard Harry, go off some two hundred feet further and make the circuit, and I will go still further away."

"If any of us make any discoveries just halloo."

The three men then started off, and Poker Paul's circuit being the smallest, he made it in the shortest time, and stood waiting for a hail from the others, for he had not discovered anything of importance.

Hawk-Eye Harry made his circuit also without any discovery, and, seeing Paul, called to him to come to him.

The two had just begun to wonder what Buffalo Bill's idea was, for they supposed that the Hussars had really perished in the cabin, as did all the soldiers, when a clear halloo was heard some distance off.

At once they went in the direction of the sound, and as they drew near the edge of the hill beheld the scout standing their quietly awaiting them.

"Well, pards, did you find anything?"

"No, Bill, not a thing."

"Nor I."

"Well, I have."

They showed interest, and Buffalo Bill led them to where a wash in the hillside was visible.

It had a thick growth of pines about it, and ran out from the slope of the hill.

"See there?"

He pointed to a large hole in the end of the washway, capable of admitting a man walking upright.

It had the appearance of being simply a cave-in, but the scout had already discovered that it was more.

The gully up to the cave-like opening was thick with fine straw, so that no trail would be left upon it, especially if a blanket was spread down to walk upon.

"Pards, this is the way the Hussars left the cabin."

"Bill, you has eyes that kin see through a rock," said Poker Paul, with enthusiasm.

"You've hit it, Bill," Hawk-Eye Harry said.

"Now, Harry, you go and see where those who came out from here struck the big Indian trail into the mountains, and Poker Paul just go up to the camp and ask Captain Vaughan to bring the men here, for there is no need watching that end."

"And you, Bill?"

"I am going to have a look into this hole."

"Better go slow."

"I intend to, for there may still be wolves in the den."

And as the two scouts walked away on their mission Buffalo Bill entered the cave, which he now saw was artificial and had been dug out, the dirt being thrown into the water-wash and carried off by the rains.

#### CHAPTER XXV.

##### A BLOW IN THE DARK.

WHEN the troopers arrived at the gully, guided thither by Poker Paul, the scout was not visible, and it was sure that he had entered the cave.

The other scout now returned and reported that the trail was hardly visible over the pine straw, but that it did lead to the large Indian trail

leading further into the mountains, and that a number of horses had passed that way.

"But what about Buffalo Bill?" asked Surgeon Powell.

"He is doubtless inspecting the interior of the cave," Captain Talbot remarked.

"He has no lantern, and if he entered when Poker Paul left him here he has been in there over half an hour in the dark," Captain Vaughan said.

"I will take a camp-lantern and go in search of him," Frank Powell said.

"And we will go, too, Poker," Hawk-Eye added.

"If you are gone long I will follow with my men, Powell," said Captain Vaughan.

A camp-lantern was then gotten out of one of the packs by Boss, the negro-servant of Captain Vaughan, and taking it Surgeon Powell entered the cave, the two scouts accompanying him.

The passage was high enough, and also sufficiently wide to admit of a large horse.

It showed that it had been dug out by human hands.

For fully three hundred yards they pushed along the narrow tunnel, and then, from the heat, knew that they must be near the cabin.

Suddenly they came out into a vast, cellar-like space, with posts all around, and the sides made solid by long poles.

The ceiling also was heavily logged, and from there came the heat, for they were under the burned cabin.

The space was large enough to hold fifty men, and the tracks showed that it was used for horses as well, for a footway of logs ran down from the roof, which enabled the animals to be brought in by way of the cabin.

But Surgeon Powell sprung quickly forward, before he took a close observation of the interior, as his eyes fell upon a form lying upon the dirt floor of the cellar.

It was Buffalo Bill, and he lay as motionless as though dead.

A wound on his head, as though made by the barrel of a revolver, showed what had felled him to the earth, and he still grasped his own weapons.

Placing his hand quickly upon his heart, Surgeon Powell said, fervently:

"Thank God, he is not dead!"

"Amen!" ejaculated Poker Paul, while Hawk-Eye Harry was rapidly making search for the one who had dealt the blow.

Under the log roadway leading to the cabin was visible a small hole, three feet by two, and seizing the lantern Hawk-Eye gazed into it.

It had an upward tendency, and he said:

"Here is where the fellow was hiding that struck Bill, and he has escaped this way, for it leads to the open air just outside of the brush wall around the cabin, in my opinion."

"Well, Hawk-Eye, we'll see to that afterward, for now we must carry Cody out to the open air."

"You are right, surgeon, for I had forgot Bill in hoping to kill his enemy," and the three men raised the unconscious scout and hastily retreated along the narrow passage.

As they drew near the opening they met Captain Vaughan and his men just entering in search of them.

An exclamation of sorrow broke from every lip, at the sight of them, when it was seen that they were bearing Buffalo Bill, who had the appearance of being dead.

Laid down upon the fine straw, the scout was at once in the hands of the skillful surgeon of the fort, so skillful in fact that the soldiers had given him the name of the "Magic Doctor."

"He had a stunning blow, and was evidently struck by one who did not see him."

"It was a pistol-barrel that hit him, and the blow caused this wound, but his thick sombrero saved his skull from fracture, fortunately, and he will soon come around all right, I feel assured."

As though to verify the surgeon's words at once, the scout breathed heavily, moaned, opened his eyes, and, after a moment, sat up.

"Well, pards, what's the matter?" he said, gazing into the anxious faces about him.

"The matter is with you, Bill," said Frank Powell.

"What's the matter with me, Doc?" he asked with surprise.

"That's what we want to know."

"Well, I feel as if I had been on a racket; and my head feels as big as a barrel— Ah! I went into that black hole, did I not, and I think I remember now getting into hot quarters, and—it seems to me I was struck in the head."

He put up his hands as he uttered the words slowly, and his fingers touched the wound.

"I did get it, Doc, after all."

"Yes, Bill, and but for your hat it would have been serious, perhaps fatal."

"Bless the old sombrero; but who hit me?"

"That we do not know."

"I'll never tell you, for I don't know."

"In fact I didn't know I was hit until you woke me up just now."

"But I've got a bad head and it won't matter much; but where was I?"

"The surgeon and the scouts took a camp-

lantern and found you in the cellar under the burned cabin, Bill," Captain Vaughan said.

"Yes, I got that far in the dark, and then it seems the darkness increased, for I don't see through it yet, but have you been to breakfast?"

"Not yet."

"I'm hungry."

All laughed, and Boss set to work at once on breakfast, while Buffalo Bill sprang to his feet, and, after a dose of medicine the surgeon gave him, seemed to feel all right again.

"Where are my scout pards?" he asked.

They were now missed, and it soon became evident that they had gone back into the cave, for the lantern was gone.

They put in an appearance, however, ere others started after them, coming over the hill, and not through the cave.

"Pards, we found daylight out o' t'other end!"

"Thar is a small creepin' hole thar thar comes out right among ther brush wall around ther cabin, and ther galoot as hit Bill jist skiped off thet way; but yer might as well try ter find a bird's trail through a fog as ter look fer it in thet pine straw," said Poker Paul.

"Yes, the Hussars gave us the go-by, even after we caught them in their den," Hawk-Eye Harry replied.

"We have not reached the end of the trail yet, comrades," was Buffalo Bill's quiet rejoinder.

Just then a horseman was seen upon the prairie, following their trail of the night before toward the foot-hills, and the scouts pronounced him one of their men from the fort.

He was signaled to, and coming up handed Captain Vaughan a letter.

"Colonel Yulee says here return at once, for we are on the wrong trail, as the Masked Hussars have just stopped a coach on the Gold Valley road and executed the driver, sending one of their men on to the next station to drive the passengers."

"Waal, of all cheek I ever heerd on, thet beats," ejaculated Poker Paul.

"The mystery must be solved," said Buffalo Bill, and within the hour all had mounted, and were on their way back to Fort Advance, Surgeon Powell having dressed the scout's wound so that he felt no trouble from it.

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

##### THE DRIVER'S FATE.

"WELL, Cody, what do you think now?"

The question was addressed by Colonel Yulee to Buffalo Bill, as the two sat together at headquarters at Fort Advance, and the scout had just read over the dispatches received from the Overland Trails regarding the mysterious band known as the Masked Hussars.

For a moment the scout made no reply.

It was the night after his return to camp, after the burning of the outlaws' cabin, and his wound was already forgotten, for he was a man hard to hurt, and what would have killed other men he would have looked upon as trifling injuries.

"Well, colonel, let us look at this matter straight in the face, and not wholly from these dispatches," he answered.

"Certainly."

"It is true that I was captured by the Masked Hussars?"

"Yes."

"I was taken blindfolded to their retreat, thirty odd miles south of here, and I met there Major Mephisto, who set me free?"

"True."

"I felt that I could find that retreat! and I did so."

"You did?"

"We saw the cabin burned, and we knew that there were a dozen or more men in it when it was set on fire."

"Yes, for you saw them through the open door."

"We found their means of escape the next day, and then came your courier recalling us."

"Yes."

"He left camp at midnight you say?"

"Yes, just at midnight, for I wished him to reach the prairie, when Vaughan was to meet you with his men, and there strike your trail."

"Then the affair on the Gold Valley Trail occurred the day before?"

"Yes."

"The day we were looking for the Hussars to the south?"

"Yes."

"And from their retreat south to the scene in the Gold Valley Trail is fifty miles, is it not, sir?"

"Just about."

"Then the Hussars could not be in one place and stop the coach, and then ride to the cabin in time to be burned out."

"It would be impossible."

"Yet your dispatches say that Major Mephisto was there?"

"So they do."

"He certainly was the one to whom I was taken, and who released me, for there cannot be two such men."

"It would not seem so."



"Now, sir, kindly see what your dispatch says regarding the attack on the coach?"

The colonel took up the dispatch and read:

"The Gold Valley Overland coach was halted yesterday at Bitter Brook, by a party of horsemen who suddenly dashed out of a canyon and surrounded it.

"They were dressed in uniform, wore brass helmets with visors that served as perfect masks.

"There were thirteen of them, and three appeared to be officers, one having his uniform trimmed with gold lace, and the other two gold and silver insignia of rank, which were skull and cross-bones worked on the left sleeve.

"But one, the leader, spoke, the others remaining silent.

"He looked into the coach, eyed each passenger closely, and then glanced up at the driver, whom he told to dismount from his box.

"The driver did so, and the leader made him take his coat off and roll up the shirt-sleeve of his left arm.

"After glancing at the arm the leader called to one of his officers and said:

"I doom this man to death!"

"He then said something to the driver which seemed to terrify him greatly, and he was led away a few paces and six of the mounted men drew their revolvers, and, at the word of their chief, fired.

"The unfortunate driver dropped dead, the six bullets having been unerringly sent into his forehead.

"Then the leader told one of his officers, the one wearing the silver skull and cross-bones, to mount the box and drive on into the stage station, ten miles distant.

"He obeyed, his horse trotting behind obediently, at the call of his rider.

"We rolled away, leaving the Hussars, as they call themselves, in the road, by the body of the dead driver.

"I got upon the box with the masked driver and asked him a number of questions.

"All I could get out of him in response, was that the leader was Major Mephisto, and that the band were known as the Masked Hussars.

"He drove us to within half a mile of the station, dismounted from the box, and bade me take the reins and drive the rest of the way.

"As he mounted his horse one of the passengers, a reckless miner, foolishly shot at him, wounding him I am sure, for he reeled in the saddle; but his revenge came quickly, as he dashed up to the coach-window and sent a bullet into the brain of the one who had fired the shot.

"Then he wheeled and rode rapidly away, and I drove on to the station, then here with this report, sending it to you by one of the stable-men."

Such was the report, and it was written by a young lieutenant who had been a passenger on the coach.

Buffalo Bill listened most attentively to the report, and then said:

"Well, colonel, there is but one way for me to learn the mysterious ways of these Masked Hussars."

"And how is that, Cody?"

"To take the coaches through and back."

"They may kill you."

"I must take the same chances that other passengers do, colonel."

"Well, Cody, the solution of the mystery is in your hands, so do as you deem best, and all the aid you need command me for it."

"Thank you, sir; but I will start out alone, and when I have made the discoveries I hope to, I will call on you, sir, to help me."

"When do you start, Cody?"

"To-night, sir."

And as the scout spoke Captain Vaughan hastily entered, his manner showing that he had important news to communicate.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### TRAILING IN DARKNESS.

BOTH Colonel Yulee and Buffalo Bill saw that Captain Vaughan had departed from his usual custom and gotten excited.

His face showed it, and his voice had an angry ring as he spoke.

"Colonel Yulee, I come to make an unfortunate report, sir," he said.

"Well, Vaughan, what has happened, for your looks show that it is no ordinary affair?"

"The prisoner has escaped, sir."

"The Indian, for he was all we had?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fighting Fox?"

"Yes, Cody; the red-skin you captured in the grave."

"He is as sly as his name," the scout said.

"But that is not all."

"Ah! there has been culpable negligence then?" said Colonel Yulee sternly.

"Hardly that, sir, under the circumstances, which I will at once explain.

"The relief guard on its rounds, sir, went to the gate sentinel's post, and the man on duty was found bound and gagged."

"What?"

"He was released, sir, and reported that he was pacing his post when he received a blow on the back of the head that felled him to the ground.

"He was partly stunned, but had no power to cope with his adversary, who he said was dressed in uniform and wore a mask.

"A gag was thrust into his mouth and he was bound and dragged into his sentry-box.

"Then his captor took his uniform-cap and walked boldly into the fort."

"A bold fellow, certainly; but he must have been one of the garrison."

"No, colonel, for the daring fellow then went to the guard-house, waited at the corner until the sentinel came along on his beat, and springing upon him dealt him a blow that must have stunned him.

"At any rate, he got the man in his power, opened the door of the guard-house, released the Indian chief, and between them they carried, or forced the sentinel to go along.

"The Indian must have rigged out in a uniform, for those there were scattered about the floor.

"They passed out in the darkness, with the sentinel a prisoner, and as they reached the sentry-box at the gate, halted.

"Then the bold rescuer told the sentinel there to say to you that he needed the soldier he had taken from the guard-house, and to scratch him off the rolls, as he would be dead within twenty-four hours.

"He also said that he desired to release Fighting Fox, and it was in doing so that he had found the man guarding him was one whom he wanted for execution, and hence he had taken him."

"Such boldness I never heard of," exclaimed Colonel Yulee, glancing about him into the faces of several of the officers who had entered, among them being Lieutenant Otey, who had so nearly lost his life at the hands of Sergeant Dudley Drew, and who had just been able to resume his duties once more.

"But, Cody, the sentinel said that the masked man threw his knife into the side of the sentry-box and said:

"Give that to Buffalo Bill from me.

"It will tell him who I am, and more, warn him to keep off my trail, for I have spared him once."

Captain Vaughan then handed the knife to Buffalo Bill.

It was a pearl-handled bowie-knife, mounted in gold, and upon the hilt was the name, neatly engraved:

"MAJOR MEPHISTO,

"The Masked Hussar."

This announcement was a cause of amazement to all, but the scout smiled and said:

"I am sorry I cannot follow the advice of Major Mephisto, for I shall still follow on his track."

"Who can he be, for he certainly must know about the fort, or he could never have come in as he did," the colonel remarked.

"Have you felt assured, Colonel Yulee, that Sergeant Dudley Drew was really slain?"

The question came from Lieutenant Hobart Otey, and it seemed to be one to startle those who heard it.

"Well, no, Otey, I am not sure that Drew was slain," the colonel replied.

"If he was not I would not suspect him, as your words imply that you do, Otey, of being the man who has been here to-night," Captain Vaughan responded.

"There is but one way to find out who he is, and that is to trail him," said Buffalo Bill.

"But he will have a great start of you by morning, Cody, as you cannot follow to-night."

"Yes, colonel, I will be off at once, for Surgeon Powell has made me a present of his splendid Spanish hound, Grip, and he will follow the trail once he is on the scent."

Exclamations of pleasure followed this announcement, Lieutenant Otey being loudest in his enthusiasm, and the scout at once left to prepare for his midnight trailing.

In a short while he was ready, Hussar under saddle, and one of the two other horses he was to take along carrying a large pack.

The enormous Spanish hound, as fierce-looking as a tiger, was then taken by Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill into the guard-house.

He quickly caught the scent, and a lariat was fastened to the ring in his collar, the other end being looped around the horn of the scout's saddle.

Then Buffalo Bill mounted, waved farewell to the crowd of officers assembled to see him start, and rode out of the fort.

The noble hound never swerved but an instant at the gate, sniffed about the sentry-box, and then with a low yelp started off across the prairie.

He seemed to soon feel that he was not to go at a rapid pace, as he was held in check by the lariat, and intelligently regulated his speed to suit what the scout deemed the best gait to go.

Arriving a quarter of a mile from the fort, the hound halted and moved about in different directions.

Instantly Buffalo Bill dismounted, and striking a match lighted a small lantern.

"It is as I thought; here are tracks, and here he left his horses while he went to the fort.

"There were two horses, and there are three men, so they will not be able to travel so very fast.

"On, Grip, and follow the trail you are on, for it is the right one."

Again mounting, the scout once more followed the hound on the trail through the darkness.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### WHAT THE SCOUT SAW.

WHEN daylight dawned and Buffalo Bill halted for rest he was many a long mile from the fort and up in the mountain country.

The noble Spanish hound had unfailingly followed the trail through the long hours of the night, and the scout had made him keep a slower pace by far than the animal cared to go.

When it became so light that he could see, the scout sought a good shelter to camp for breakfast, and after feeding the hound and staking out the horses he went back to the trail and closely examined it.

"Two horses, both shod, and a man on foot and wearing a boot.

"I am on the right trail, that is certain."

So saying he returned to the side of the little brook, built a small fire, made a pot of coffee and ate his breakfast.

An hour's rest he felt was enough for the hound and the horses, and so mounted and pressed on once more.

The trail led him into the depths of the mountains, and in a direction that he knew, by going on a straight line for a hundred miles, he would cross the five Overland trails of the coach lines.

It was noon when he halted upon the brow of a lofty ridge that overhung a beautiful valley.

Through the lower end of the valley he knew that one of the Overland trails ran, and he was aware that no settler had yet been bold enough to make a home in that vicinity, few caring to go far from the mining-camps or army outposts.

So occupied was he in looking toward the lower end of the valley that he failed to observe a more interesting sight nearer, until a growl from Grip caused him to follow the eyes of the hound who was looking sheer down beneath him.

The sight that the scout beheld seemed to please him, for his face lighted up with a smile.

What he saw was a level meadow encircled by a flowing stream.

It was close in under the ridge, and upon the meadow were staked a number of horses feeding upon the rich grass that grew there in abundance.

Nearer in under the ridge was a camp, and in it the scout counted fifteen forms.

The camp was a temporary one, for there were no tents, cabins or wickiups, but merely several fires around which the men were gathered eating their evening meal.

The trail which the scout had been following led down the ridge-side to the valley below.

But for Grip it would have been lost a score of times, never to have been regained, as the nature of the ground had been such no human being could even have followed it.

But Grip's nose never failed in following the scent, and Buffalo Bill patted him on the head and said:

"You are true as steel, Grip, and you brought me to the right spot."

It was yet nearly an hour to sunset, at least from where the scout was on the ridge, though the shadows in the valley had begun to deepen already.

From his point of lookout Buffalo Bill could see the little camp, while he himself remained unseen.

He had fastened his horses back on the ridge, where they had good feeding, and with Grip by his side was watching the movements in the camp below.

There were fifteen men, thirteen of whom were in the uniform and helmets of the Hussars, and not a visor did he see up, even though they were in camp, further than to permit of their eating their supper.

Taking his glass the scout turned it upon the party, and then, off under a tree, he discovered a sixteenth person, busy about a small fire.

There, too, was a pack-saddle on the ground, and near it were a camp-stool and a camp-table.

This man also was in the uniform of the Masked Hussars, but even though engaged in cooking he wore the brass helmet.

Two of the men about the other fires were, however, without a uniform.

One of these was, as Buffalo Bill plainly saw, his captive Indian, Fighting Fox, who had been rescued the night before from the guard-house of Fort Advance by Major Mephisto.

He was in his chief's costume now, though it was pretty much worn after his confinement in the guard-house.

He stood slightly apart, talking to one whose tall form and erect bearing showed him to be the leader of the Masked Hussars, the Major Mephisto whom Buffalo Bill had seen at the cabin retreat and who had set him free.

Leaning against a tree not far distant from where stood Major Mephisto and the Indian chief, was a man in uniform.

The scout turned his glass upon him for a long time, and then murmured slowly to himself:

"He is bound, and he is the soldier that Major Mephisto brought from the fort with him,



the man who was on guard over the Fighting Fox.

"I will see what can be done to rescue him to-night."

So saying the scout led his horses back to a good camping place, made them secure, fed Grip and tied him to a tree, placing a muzzle upon him to prevent his making any sound, and then went back to the ridge bluff.

During his absence the prisoner in uniform had been released from his bonds and was eating his supper, while one of the Masked Hussars stood near waiting for him to finish the meal.

Riding away from the camp was Fighting Fox, having just parted from Major Mephisto, who had apparently gone to get him one of the horses staked out on the meadow.

"I shall see what can be done for that soldier to-night," muttered the scout, and he went back to his solitary camp to eat his supper as the night gathered about him.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A DARING DEED.

It looked as black as jet in the valley to Buffalo Bill, as he returned to the ridge bluff and looked down.

The fires twinkled as they smoldered, now and then a flame springing up to die out in an instant.

The scout had prepared himself for the daring trip he had contemplated, by taking off his boots and replacing them with a pair of moccasins.

He also took off his coat and sombrero, placing a cap upon his head.

His rifle was slung at his back, and his revolvers and knife were in his belt, while a lariat was held in one hand.

He had noted the trail that led to the valley, while it was light, so that he had no difficulty in making his way down and around the side of the hill, the way that he knew Major Mephisto, the Indian and the prisoner had gone.

Arriving at a position near the camp he remained watching for some time.

The flame in one of the fires flashed up for a moment, as though for his benefit, and he spied the camping-place of the chief, near him a man lying, who was without doubt the one he had seen cooking at the fire off to itself, and in a group beneath a large tree were the men.

"They are not all there."

"Some are lying elsewhere, or have gone off on guard duty, so I must be very careful," he said.

Creeping still nearer he waited until the flickering fire again flashed up in flame and he saw the prisoner lying at the tree to which he had been bound.

To reach him would be dangerous in the extreme, but Buffalo Bill meant to try it.

While the flame burned he took in the entire situation, and then going nearer he remained for a long time waiting and watching.

"Fires are treacherous, for when one thinks they are out, up bursts a flame, so I must not be caught that way," he said.

Feeling convinced that the fires had died out he at last began to move along toward the tree.

He had noticed a wash in the ground that led near the tree, and getting into this he made his way to within twenty feet of the prisoner.

Not thirty feet off in another direction were the Hussars asleep on their blankets, and he felt that a chain of sentinels were around the camp and horses, excepting on the side toward the bluff.

"Now or never," he muttered, grimly, and he wormed himself along on the ground toward the tree.

He was within three feet of the prisoner when he saw him start, and he knew that the soldier was awake and had seen him.

"Sh! I am Buffalo Bill," he whispered.

"Thank God! you have come to save me," came the answering whisper.

The scout drew nearer and held out his hand with the knife in it and quickly the bonds on the wrist were severed.

Then those that held the ankles were cut.

"Now fix your blanket to appear as though you were under it and creep after me, but make no sound."

The soldier obeyed, and the gully was reached in safety.

Here they remained for a moment, and then once more the scout was about to move on when suddenly his quick eye detected a form coming through the darkness.

Lying quiet, they saw him approach the sleeping men and call up five of them.

These arose and started away silently, while the man who had awakened them threw himself down upon the blankets just vacated.

"They are changing guard, for it is midnight."

"Some of them are awake, so we dare not leave this gully until the others return and go to sleep."

"But if it comes to a run, follow me when I give the word," whispered Buffalo Bill.

"I will do as you say, sir," responded the soldier.

In five minutes forms were seen approaching

through the darkness and coming toward the camp.

There were four of them, the fifth man having come in to arouse the relief to go out to their posts.

The four passed near the tree where the prisoner was supposed to be and then went and joined their sleeping comrades, throwing themselves down to rest.

It seemed to the soldier ages that Buffalo Bill waited, but the latter was as patient as an Indian, and not until he was sure that the Hussars were all asleep again did he stir from the gully.

Then he crept out, the soldier close at his heels, and at last the shelter of the trees at the base of the bluff were reached.

Going up the trail at as rapid a gait as the soldier could follow, they soon reached the place where the scout had left his horses and the hound.

He told the soldier to mount, and then started along the ridge, going slowly and cautiously.

It was fully an hour before they reached a broad trail that crossed the mountain and here Buffalo Bill halted.

"Now, my man, this trail will lead you to the stage station twelve miles from Fort Advance, and this horse will carry you there in four hours if you push him."

"Please say to Colonel Yulee that I continue on, and send you back to report."

"Do you understand, my man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now let me ask you if you know the man who made you a prisoner?"

"His men call him Major Mephisto, sir."

"You know him by no other name?"

"No, sir."

"Why did he make you a prisoner?"

"He said he would tell me before I was shot."

"Ah! but he knew you?"

"He seemed to recognize me, sir, when he made me prisoner at the guard-house."

"Have you any mark on your left arm, my man?"

"Well, yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"There is tattooed in my arm a skull and cross-bones in black, with a chain of red links surrounding it."

"A strange device."

The man made no reply, and Buffalo Bill said:

"Now be off, and I advise you not to tarry."

"But, Mr. Cody, I wish to thank you for saving my life, and you took a fearful risk to do so, sir."

"We all have to take risks upon the border; but now good-night, and I am sorry I have no saddle and bridle for you, but the blanket and lariat will serve in their place, and I have an extra revolver you can have, as you may need it."

The soldier held out his hand and wrung the scout's warmly in farewell.

Then the two parted, the soldier returning to the fort and Buffalo Bill penetrating further into the mountains.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE SOLDIER'S STORY.

WHEN the rescued soldier rode up to the gates of the fort, his horse showed that he had been pressed hard, for he was covered with foam, and panted heavily.

The rider had not spared him, in his anxiety to reach a place of safety, and had not tarried at the stage station longer than to learn the nearest trail to the fort.

His coming had been reported to the officer of the day, and Captain Vaughan had been sent for and recognized with his glass the man who had been captured by Major Mephisto while on duty at the guard-house.

"Well, Van Dorn, you are back again I am glad to see, and it looks as if you had escaped from Major Mephisto," said Captain Vaughan.

"I have, sir, but not by myself."

"Could I see the colonel, sir?" answered the soldier.

"Yes, I will take you to him."

Now Van Dorn was not a soldier that was very popular in the fort.

He was a surly fellow, and one of a number who had enlisted upon the border, and who had given considerable trouble on account of their recklessness and unruly ways.

Colonel Yulee did not like the man, and he had half-believed that he was secretly a friend of the Masked Hussar, to have been so readily surprised on his post.

So he said sternly:

"You are back, sir?"

"Yes, colonel, and glad to get back, sir."

"What excuse have you for leaving your post?"

"Colonel Yulee, I was no more expecting danger than you are now, sir."

"I was walking up and down, from corner to corner of the guard-house, when I was suddenly knocked down."

"The guard-house lamp over the door was burning, sir, and I saw that the man was in uniform and wore a mask."

"He thrust a revolver to my head and told

me he would fire if I uttered a word, and then he forced a gag into my mouth and drew up the sleeve of my left arm."

"I thought I was not mistaken when I saw your face," he said to me, and then he tied my arms behind my back, and a more powerful devil I never saw, sir."

"Then he unlocked the door, sir, and called to the Injun, speaking in the Sioux tongue, and he made the red-skin put on a uniform that he pulled out of the chest there, and put him on one side of me, telling me if I made any resistance he would knife me."

"He then led the way to the gate, and getting there, I saw that Dennis Lester was gagged and bound in the sentry-box."

"Going out on the prairie, we came to two horses staked out, and I mounted one, the Indian springing up behind me, and Major Mephisto rode the other animal."

"After a long ride the Indian walked, and then I was forced to, and in that way we kept on into the mountains until we came to the camp of the Hussars about noon the next day."

"I was tied to a tree, sir, and knowing I was to be killed, for Major Mephisto said he would have me shot, and tell me why when the time came, I could not sleep, and was lying awake when I saw something dark creeping toward me."

"The Hussars were only a short distance off, and the guards were around the camp; but I thought it was a panther or bear, and being bound I was about to call out, when I saw that it was a man."

"Buffalo Bill, by all that's holy!" cried Colonel Yulee excitedly.

"Yes, sir, and he saved me, though while we were lying there in a gully, the guard was changed; but the scout had made me fix my blanket to look as though I was under it, and my absence was not noticed."

"The splendid fellow," said the colonel.

"So I think, sir; but he took me to where his horses were and rode with me to the stage-trail."

"Then he put me on his extra horse, gave me this revolver and told me to come back and report to you that he was going on after the Hussars."

"Well, Van Dorn, you have had a close call, and you owe your life to Buffalo Bill."

"I will not have you punished for being captured on your post, but be careful not to be caught napping again."

"I will, sir."

"Do you know who this man is who calls himself Major Mephisto?"

"No, sir."

"Did he give you no reason for your capture?"

"No, sir."

"But he meant to kill you?"

"So he said, sir."

"And the Indian?"

"Went on with us, sir, and then Major Mephisto gave him a horse and he started for the camp of Red Heart, the Renegade."

"Did you see this Mephisto's face?"

"No, sir."

"Nor the faces of any of his men?"

"No, sir, for they were kept constantly hidden by the mask on the helmet."

"Well, you can go now," and Colonel Yulee turned to Lieutenant Otey who just then entered.

"Well, Otey, what is it?"

"Colonel Yulee, have you not had the key of Sergeant Drew's cabin, until you gave it to me an hour ago, sir?"

"Yes, Otey."

"No one else has had it?"

"No, for it has been kept in my private desk."

"Who locked it up, sir?"

"Vaughan did, at my request."

Turning to Captain Vaughan who was present, Lieutenant Otey asked:

"Captain, will you oblige me by going with me to see if all in that cabin is as you left it?"

"Certainly," and Grayson Vaughan walked out with the ordnance officer.

In a short while they returned and Captain Vaughan said:

"Some one has been there, colonel."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir, for a number of things are gone."

"Among them a most beautiful portrait which the sergeant had painted of some lady friend," Hobart Otey remarked.

"There can be no mistake, Vaughan?"

"None, colonel, for I left all there in very different shape from what I found them, I assure you."

"There were a pair of rapiers, some dueling-pistols, the sergeant's belt of arms, and numerous other things that I saw there, are not there now, colonel," Hobart Otey observed.

"Well, I will have the matter looked into, and if they have been taken by any one in the fort, they can be found; but is not that a courier, Vaughan?" and Colonel Yulee looked out of the window as he spoke, his eyes resting upon a horseman who had just ridden into the fort.

The man was a courier, and entering head-



quarters handed to Colonel Yulee his dispatches.

Having glanced over the official papers, Colonel Yulee picked up a letter addressed in a very beautiful feminine hand.

His face brightened, and then clouded as he read it, and he turned, as was his wont, to his adjutant:

"Vaughan."

"Yes, sir."

"I have a letter here from my daughter."

"I trust she is well, colonel?"

"Yes, and she is coming here."

"Coming to Fort Advance, sir?" said Grayson Vaughan, who had seen the colonel's daughter two years ago and remembered her then as a very beautiful maiden of seventeen.

"Yes, she writes me to expect her soon, and says that the family she was going to Europe with will not go, as Mr. Hull has died, and he is the father of Ethel's schoolmate and boon companion.

"So she says she will start West and come to me, and she is anxious to lead the wild life again that she did when she was fourteen and was on the Texan border with me for two years."

"We must spruce the old fort up, colonel, and get all things in shape for Miss Yulee's coming."

"Thank you, Vaughan, but Ethel is one who takes things as she finds them; but I am really glad she is coming, especially as Talbot's wife and Dugro's sister are to join them.

"Why, the old fort will be quite lively."

"Yes, sir; but will not Miss Yulee have to have an escort from the point she leaves the coach?"

"True, and I would ask you to command the escort; but I do not know just when she is coming, or at what point to expect her; and, Vaughan, now I think of it, with these Masked Hussars on the Overland trails, I am almost sorry she is coming," and the anxious look again came over the face of Colonel Yulee as Major Mephisto and his men flashed before his mind.

#### CHAPTER XXXI.

##### RECKLESS BEN.

THERE was a reign of terror along the Overland trails which ran from a certain starting-point upon the prairies into the range of mountains which few white men had dared to penetrate until a couple of years before.

With mines scattered through the mountains, army posts established at different points, and settlements becoming more frequent, there had come to be a demand for a means of traveling from point to point.

Hence the establishment of the Overland stage-coach lines, diverging from the main trail to half a dozen different points, some of the runs being a hundred miles.

As one of these Overland trails had a station within a dozen miles of Fort Advance on the north and another trail came within twice that distance to the southward, Colonel Yulee did not know at which point to look for his daughter's arrival.

The Sioux, since the terrible blow dealt their villages by Captain Vaughan, had been keeping very quiet, and yet the stage-lines ran dangerously near their hunting-grounds and many people forced to travel that way were fearful of massacre.

Then the Masked Hussars had won a fearful name as desperate knights of the road, though, excepting their attack on soldiers, not an act of bloodshed could be placed against them, nor had they robbed the passengers in a single instance.

Still the Indians and the Masked Hussars were a nightmare to passengers, and travel on the Overland trails was entered upon with fear and trembling.

At one of the stations a stage was standing one morning, awaiting to start on its run through the mountains.

It was a breakfast station, and a wretched place at that, for only half a dozen log cabins joined together comprised what was known as the "Prairie Hotel."

There were log stables, a saloon, blacksmith shop, and a few scattering cabins of hardy settlers, and these *in toto* were known as Prairie City.

The driver of the coach about to go over the mountain trail was known as Reckless Ben, and he had won his name from his sheer recklessness in the face of dangers which he had been forced to meet in his half-dozen years of stage-driving.

He was a giant in size, strong as a lion, quick to use his weapons in necessity and a dead-shot.

He drove four splendid horses to his coach, which was painted in the highest degree of art, according to his views, but did not look unlike a rainbow as far as colors were concerned.

He was patiently waiting for the incoming stage across the prairies, when he would take the passengers and mail brought in and start on his drive of sixty miles to the prairies beyond the mountain-spur and which would carry him within twelve miles of Fort Advance.

He was calmly smoking his pipe when a stranger walked up and saluted him politely:

"You come in last night, didn't yer, pard, fer I thought I seen yer ride inter ther hotel stables?" he said to the stranger.

"Yes, and I tried to find you last night, but could not, as they said you had gone to a dance at another settlement," the stranger replied.

"So I hed, pard, fer thar was new settlers come in thar, and they had darters with 'em, and gals is skeerce in these parts and I does like ter sling a hoof in a Virginny reel an' sich."

"I hope you had a good time, sir."

"I rid fifteen mile ter git thar, danced ontill four o'clock, rid back here, and I jist feel lovely, and will go ag'in, for thar is a female critter that I tuk a shine to, and I is a marryin' man, pard."

"I hope to be at your wedding, and if you will do me a favor I'll give you and your bride a fine horse each for a marriage gift."

"Now will yer?"

"I will."

"Yer looks like a man as c'u'dn't lie if yer want to."

"I can, but I won't."

"I'll tie to yer, pard, though I never seen yer afore last night, when you rid inter ther stable as I was ridin' out to go to ther dance."

"I will keep my word, and throw in a saddle and bridle for you, and your wife too."

"That gal has got ter marry me now; but what is it yer wants did?"

"Do you ever drive six horses over the mountains?"

"I tried it oncet, but they is too hard ter handle on these roads."

"Well, I wish you to put my two horses in as leaders and drive them."

"Now what on earth does yer want me to do thet fer?"

"There are no better horses on this frontier, I assure you, and I wish you would do it."

"Yer hain't playin' no game on me?"

"No, and I wish you to take my pack-saddle and pack along too."

"Pard, what is yer up to, fer ther Lord's sake?"

The stranger did not reply, but simply drew back his coat and showed a gold badge that he wore.

Reckless Ben glanced at it, then at the stranger and said earnestly:

"Pard, say no more, fer I'll go yer, durned ef I don't, for you is jist ther man I hes long want to see."

"Put it thar, pard, fer I likes your style."

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

##### THE TATTOOED ARM.

WHILE Reckless Ben and the stranger were talking over the matter of putting two extra horses in the lead of the driver's four, the stage-coach was sighted coming far across the prairie.

Reckless Ben and his companion at once went to the stables, to get the two extras in harness, and as the stage with its six-in-hand rolled out, the other one came up at a run, for no matter how slow the pace on the road, when they neared the stations the drivers were wont to "whoop 'em up," as they elegantly expressed it.

In addition to having his two horses as leaders, the stranger had his pack-saddle stowed in the boot, and his own saddle and bridle in a bag on top.

The stranger stood quietly surveying the passengers as they alighted from the coach, and he saw among them a young and beautiful girl.

There was also an old woman, poorly dressed and with a sad face, a miner in his rough garb, and a soldier, who seemed about to recognize the stranger when he gave him a warning glance and turned away.

As the passengers went in to breakfast, Reckless Ben said to the stranger:

"Pards, we has got a high-toned leddy along ter-day, fer she are ther darter o' Colonel Yulee at Fort Advance, and she are goin' through to her pa."

"Indeed! She was the young lady, then, whom I saw get out of the coach?"

"Yas, and we has a sojer along, too, and ten ter one he will suffer, fer them Masked Hussars is awful hard on the army boys."

"I hope we will get through all right," was the reply.

"I hopes so, too, fer ther sake o' ther leddies, fer I does hate scrimmages when wimmin-folks is round; but does you ride up with me on ther box?"

"No, I think I shall ride inside," was the reply.

"Waal, you knows best; but whar will yer dog ride?"

"Make him lie down at your feet in the boot, and if the Hussars halt us, drop a blanket over him to hide him."

"He won't bite?"

"No, he will obey you, for he has great intelligence."

"Come, sir, up on the box and lie down," and the stranger turned to a large, sagacious-

looking hound that he had just led out of the stable.

In obedience the noble animal went up over the wheel to the box and laid down out of sight in the boot.

"I'll be keerful all ther same not ter put my foot on his trail in mistake fer ther brake," said Reckless Ben.

The young lady passenger now came out, and she was kindly assisting the old woman, who seemed in feeble health, while she remarked:

"I hope I can stand it to get to the end of the road, where my boy is in the mines."

"When he sent for me to come to him, that he was getting rich, I don't think he knew I was getting old, miss."

"Oh, you will soon recuperate after you get there," said the young lady, in a pleasant tone, and she aided the other into the stage, just as the stranger stepped forward to offer his services.

"Thank you, sir," and the maiden glanced up into the handsome face of the stranger.

The miner and soldier now got in, the stranger followed, and with a crack of his whip Reckless Ben sent his six-in-hand on their journey, followed, as was the custom of Prairie Citizens, by a whoop from those who were congregated about the "hotel" to see the stage depart.

In fact that was the event of Prairie City.

On rolled the coach, moving toward the Lone Mountain range rising in the distance, and which was yet miles away.

The seat of the stranger was in front, directly opposite to the maiden, and the soldier and the miner also occupied a seat in front with him.

The two ladies occupied the rear seat, the center one being folded up and not in use.

The soldier asked several questions regarding the country, which the stranger answered, and this caused the young lady to also make inquiries regarding the Overland trails, and the distance she would have to travel to reach Fort Advance, after leaving the coach.

The stranger gave her all the information she wished, in a quiet way that was very winning, and she was emboldened to say:

"And how will I reach the fort, sir, after leaving the stage, for I have not notified my father of my coming, for I am a daughter of Colonel Yulee, the commandant."

"I am going to the fort, Miss Yulee, and will inform your father that you are at the station, or I will be glad to offer myself as an escort, if you will accept of my services."

"I should be glad to do so, thank you, sir, as I am most anxious to reach my home, for I may call it so, as an army officer has no home I suppose, but the garrison where he is stationed; but will you tell me something of those terrible Masked Hussars that I hear so much about all along the way?"

"They are a band of road-agents, under a skillful leader, who seems to be seeking revenge rather than gold."

"But revenge against whom?"

"The army, for his blows have been against soldiers, and his revenge lies against them."

"He is the soldiers' foe, then?"

"Yes, Miss Yulee."

"But what motive can he have of revenge?"

"That I do not know."

"I wonder if I am safe?" the soldier said, with a smile that was forced.

"He may not halt us, sir."

"But if he did?"

"May I ask, sir, if you will show me your left arm, and perhaps I can tell you?"

"Show you my arm?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Have you any tattooing upon it?"

"Well, yes; but how did you know it?"

"I did not, I merely wished to know if you had."

"Well, I have."

"A skull and cross-bones tattooed in black, with a red chain around it?"

"Yes," and the soldier's face whitened.

But he rolled up his sleeve and there revealed the tattooing.

"May I ask why you allowed that to be done?" the stranger asked.

"Oh, it was simply for fun."

"Was it done long ago?"

"Some time, yes."

"Others have the same mark."

"How do you know?"

"It matters not, but my advice to you is not to go over the Overland Trail, but to strike out on foot and avoid the Masked Hussars."

"But why?" asked the frightened soldier.

"That mark will cost you your life," was the cool reply.

#### CHAPTER XXXIII.

##### THE FATAL MARK.

"You will not take my advice, my soldier friend?" asked the stranger, as the coach rolled along.

"No."

"It is good advice."

"Nonsense."

"Call it so, but remember that I warned you."



"I do not believe I will suffer because I have that mark on my arm."

"Others have."

"Not on that account."

"Yes, that mark is fatal if the Hussars halt us."

"I cannot believe it."

"It is but a short distance back to the station, and I again advise you to go back and try some other way of crossing the mountains, and, in fact, wait until some scouting party comes along."

"I will go through now."

"Well, the secret is with you, and you know best who it is that is wreaking revenge upon those who wear that mark."

All saw the soldier turn pale, but he seemed to feel that he was safe, and the subject was dropped, for, seeing him stubborn, the stranger said no more about it.

"Tell me of those strange Hussars, please," urged Ethel Yulee of the stranger.

He told of their strange uniform, their helmet masks, and what it was said that they had done upon the Overland trails, adding:

"Ladies have nothing to fear at their hands, I am sure, Miss Yulee, nor have men who are not stamped with that fatal tattoo."

They had now reached the mountains, and the stage was winding up the steep trails.

At noon they stopped at the mountain station to change the horses and get dinner.

A rest of an hour was made, but the leaders were again put back in the team, with four fresh horses behind them.

But the leaders seemed not to mind this at all, for they appeared equally as fresh as the new team, and Reckless Ben seemed to have spared them all he could.

As they were getting into the coach to start again, a horseman suddenly dashed by at full speed.

He was clad in uniform, and the stranger said he must be an army courier, and his destination was Fort Advance.

But he was gone before he could be hailed, that Ethel Yulee might send word to her father of her coming.

So on once more the coach rolled on its way, the hoofs of the horses and roar of the wheels awakening a thousand echoes through the mountain passes.

"Pards and leddies, we is gittin' inter Hussar stampin'-ground now," called Reckless Ben through the window, and his words caused all except one to start.

That one was the stranger, and Ethel Yulee noticed that his face neither changed color nor moved a muscle.

The soldier now moved uneasily, and said:

"I wish I had taken your advice, sir."

"I hope you will not have cause to regret it."

Hardly had the words been uttered, when out of a canyon on either side darted a number of horsemen.

There were six on a side, and they surrounded the coach in an instant.

Not a word was spoken, and Reckless Ben drew rein.

"They are upon us, but do not be alarmed," the stranger said, addressing Ethel Yulee and the elderly lady.

Just then there rode out of the canyon on the right a horseman of splendid appearance.

He rode a snow-white horse, with sweeping mane and tail and arched neck.

The bridle and saddle were military, and very handsome.

The rider wore stylish cavalry-boots, spurs, a uniform trimmed with gold, gauntlet-gloves and a brass helmet that shone like fire.

His face was completely covered by the visor, and a network of brass fell from the low edge of the helmet upon his shoulders.

In the helmet was a crimson horsehair plume, and he certainly was a most striking individual.

Riding up to the stage window on the side where the stranger and Ethel Yulee sat, he bowed low and said:

"Pardon, ladies, if I disturb you, but it is one of the misfortunes of travel in this wild land."

Then he glanced at the others in the coach, his eyes resting for a long time upon the face of the soldier, who became livid under the gaze.

"You are a soldier, I see," he said.

"I am," was the low reply.

"How long have you been in the army?"

"Two years."

"Where did you enlist?"

"In Texas."

"I thought so."

"Let me see your left arm, please."

The soldier held it out.

"Bare it, please."

"What for?"

"Because I ask it."

"I will not."

"Bare it, please."

And a revolver looked squarely in the face of the soldier.

He did so slowly and turned the back to the gaze of the Hussar.

"The other side, sir."

It was slowly turned over.

"Ah! as I supposed, you bear the fatal tattoo."

"I seldom forget a face."

"Who are you?" asked the soldier, in a voice that trembled.

"Major Mephisto, the Masked Hussar."

The soldier uttered no word, and the Hussar continued:

"You will dismount from the coach, please, for I want you."

"What for?"

"To die!"

A cry of horror broke from the lips of Ethel Yulee, and she cried:

"Spare him, sir, I beg of you, for he is one of my father's command."

"Your father, lady?"

"Yes, sir."

"His name, please."

"Colonel Yulee."

"Ah, yes; and you are his daughter?"

"I am."

"I cannot spare this man, Miss Yulee, for he must die."

"My dear sir, will you not make an exception in your revenge this time, for the sake of the ladies present?" said the stranger.

Major Mephisto now turned his gaze full upon the speaker, and said in a stern voice:

"Buffalo Bill, do not tax my patience with you too far."

"Buffalo Bill!"

The name was uttered by each one in the coach in their amazement at finding out who the handsome stranger was.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### DOOMED.

"YAS, that's him! that's Buf'ler Bill," cried Reckless Ben, who had gotten down from the box and was standing on the step of the coach, looking in the window opposite to the Hussar.

"Yes, I know that it is Buffalo Bill, for we have met before," said Major Mephisto.

"We cannot meet too often to please me, Major Mephisto," said the scout with a meaning look.

"We might, Cody, for patience may cease to be a virtue on my part."

"I have never asked mercy of you, sir, and never will."

"Still I have spared you."

"Granted you did so, once; but my turn may come some day to hold you at my mercy."

"I think not."

"I could have killed you several nights ago."

"Ah!"

"Yes."

"Where and how?"

"In your camp in the Meadow Valley?"

"Ha! you were there then?"

"Did you not miss a prisoner?"

"By Heaven! but you released that soldier?"

"I did."

"That was the boldest act of your bold life, Buffalo Bill."

The scout laughed.

"I went into Fort Advance to rescue an Indian—"

"Ore I captured?"

"Yes, and I knew he was being held for the good conduct of that renegade white chief of the Sioux, Red Heart."

"I feared Red Heart would do some act to get Fighting Fox out of the way, for he is next to the renegade in rank, and so I determined to free him."

"I risked my life to enter the fort—"

"And that was the boldest act of your life, Major Mephisto."

"Oh, no, Cody, for I have done the same thing before."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"It was not known."

"The sentinel on duty, seeing that I did no damage, kept it to himself that I caught him on his post, bound and gagged him until I came out."

"But I recognized in the guard over Fighting Fox, one I wanted, and I forced him to go with me."

"I would have shot him at sunrise, and you rescued him in the night."

"Yes, I saved you from committing one murder at least."

"I shall catch him again, mark my words."

"I think not."

"Wait and see; but how did you follow me in the night, and even keep my trail by day?"

"I have good eyes for trailing outlaws," was the stern retort.

"Do not be severe, Buffalo Bill, for you know not what impels my actions in this matter."

"Some day I will find out."

"Never."

"We shall see; but to the question at hand, will you not spare this man?"

"I will not."

"Not at the request of these ladies?"

"No, under no consideration will I spare him."

"He must die," and the voice fairly rung out the words.

"How have I wronged you?" cried the poor soldier.

"When you face your executioners, sir, you shall know why it is I sentence you to death."

"Come, you are delaying the stage."

"Get out, and know that you have but ten minutes to live, so make your peace with your Maker, if you hope for mercy for your guilty soul."

The soldier seemed prostrated with terror; but Buffalo Bill said:

"Come, my man, if you are forced to face death, do it like a man, for we all have to die, and must not shirk it like a coward."

The words seemed to help the man, for he looked up and said:

"But must I die?"

"You must!" was the stern response of Major Mephisto.

"It's got to be did, pard, so brace up and have some style about yer," said Reckless Ben.

"But you can save me, Buffalo Bill!" cried the soldier.

"I cannot."

"You are called the bravest of the brave, you are armed, and, with the driver there are five of us, so let us fight them."

"My friend, Buffalo Bill is the bravest of the brave, and yet he is no fool, for I have around this coach twelve men, armed to the teeth, and it would be certain death to resist me."

"No, you must die, and if you will not die as becomes one who wears your uniform, then I will have you dragged out, tied to a tree, and shot."

"If die I must, I will face death as becomes my uniform."

"I have been a bad man in the past, and I hoped to redeem my life as a soldier; but you say it shall not be."

"I am ready, Major Mephisto."

"Bravo, pard, you has got grit arter all," cried Reckless Ben, while Buffalo Bill grasped his hand and remarked:

"Well said, Soldier Pard, and I will go with you to the last moment, if Major Mephisto will permit."

"I will, sir, for the sake of the man's last words, for I admire pluck."

"I am glad I will not have to execute a coward, as I feared," was the reply.

"Good-by, and God bless you."

"Give me your name and I will tell my father how you died," said Ethel Yulee, offering her hand.

"His name was Henry Jackson, Miss Yulee; but he has doubtless changed it for certain reasons," said Major Mephisto.

"You do know me," the soldier said, with surprise.

"Yes, that is why I kill you."

"My name is Henry Jackson, miss; but in the army I am enlisted as Jack Henderson, and I belong to Captain Vaughan's cavalry company; but have been East on a furlough for some weeks."

"I thank you, miss, and good-by."

The old lady then grasped his hand with a simple:

"God bless you."

Then he sprung out of the coach, while Reckless Ben said in his quaint way:

"Good luck, pard, whar yer is goin', and I guesses its Scriptur' ef yer repents o' yer onery deeds, and dies game, yer soul will strike ther right trail when it shakes yer body fer good."

The soldier walked boldly to the rear of the coach, Buffalo Bill accompanied him, and on each side of the vehicle every other Hussar drew his horse back and rode also to the scene which Major Mephisto pointed out for the execution ground.

The old lady sat back weeping in the corner of the coach, and Ethel Yulee, with white, stern face, looked out of the window, unable to resist the fascination of the strange scene.

As though well-drilled in their work, the six Hussars drew up in line at one side of the road, and Buffalo Bill walked with the soldier to the spot which Major Mephisto pointed out.

#### CHAPTER XXXV.

##### AVENGED.

The soldier had now gained his nerve and was perfectly calm.

His face was white, but his muscles were firm, and he said with a sad smile to Buffalo Bill:

"I wish I had taken your advice, sir."

"I wish so from my heart; but, my friend, though it may be poor consolation to you to know it now, the time will come when these Hussars will reach the end of their rope," said the scout, sternly.

"I know not why he has me shot; but he told me he would tell me before I died."

"Is there anything I can do for you, my friend?"

"Yes, sir; take these napers and my watch and chain to Captain Vaughan, and he will send them back to my young wife, for I was only married three weeks ago, and had thirty



days' leave to go and come; but I'll never get back now."

"Kindly step one side, Mr. Cody," called out Major Mephisto, and the scout grasped the hand of the soldier.

"Be brave, for it will be over at once."

"You are a brave fellow, and Colonel Yulee shall know all."

"Good-by."

Buffalo Bill stepped to one side as he spoke, folded his arms upon his broad chest and gazed upon the scene with unmoved face.

What he felt he did not show.

The soldier stood erect, his face calm, but livid, and his eyes turned upon his executioners.

Then the Hussar chief dismounted and walked to the side of the doomed man, opposite to that on which stood the scout, and turning he called out:

"Attention, Hussars!"

The six horsemen sat upright and faced the doomed soldier.

"Draw!"

Their hands dropped upon their holsters, and six revolvers were drawn forth.

Then Major Mephisto stepped quickly to the side of the soldier and said something in a low tone.

The soldier started, and gazing at the Hussar chief's masked face, cried excitedly:

"No, no, not you?"

"Yes."

Then came the order in a voice that rung through the mountains:

"One, two, three, fire!"

The six revolvers flashed as one weapon, and the six bullets almost went as one into the forehead of the soldier.

Without a moan he sunk in his tracks, and Major Mephisto said calmly:

"For the courage that man showed, bury him, and do not leave his body for the prowling wolves."

The six horsemen rode up to the body, and dismounting bore it away.

"Now, Major Mephisto, I suppose we are at liberty to go on our way?" said Buffalo Bill.

"Not yet, sir."

"Do you seek another victim?"

"No, sir, not a victim."

"What then?"

"A hostage."

"Who do you want as a hostage?"

"One of the passengers."

"And a hostage for what?"

"For one I desire to get possession of."

"I suppose that you wish to keep me as a hostage?"

"No."

The two stood by the side of the coach, and all heard what was said.

"I trust this miner does not wear the mark that seems to have the same effect upon you that a red rag has on a bull?"

"You are inclined to be facetious, Mr. Cody."

"But that miner does not wear the fatal tattoo, for, as I said, I never forget a face, and I never saw him before to-day."

"You surely are not going to deprive us of our driver, Reckless Ben?"

"No; though I found a driver once who had the fatal tattoo, and he shared the fate of your soldier comrade."

"Then who, sir, is it that you claim for a hostage?"

"Miss Yulee."

"What!" and Buffalo Bill's face flashed up with a dangerous light.

"Yes, sir, I shall claim Miss Yulee as a hostage."

"Be a man and take me."

"By Heaven, step off there ten paces and meet me, and let it decide whether you shall do so cowardly an act," cried the scout.

"Be calm, Mr. Cody, for I am no coward. I mean no harm to Miss Yulee."

"I wish to take her as a hostage that this red work may end, and I shall make a demand upon her father, and see what the result will be."

"My father is poor, sir, and can pay no large ransom for me," said Ethel, with a manner that was strangely calm.

"The ransom I ask, Miss Yulee, is not gold, but flesh and blood."

"What do you mean, sir?"

The Hussar chief took from his pocket an envelope and a sheet of paper.

Upon the latter he wrote a few lines, placed it in the envelope, and sealed it.

This he addressed to

"COLONEL YULEE,

"Commandant Fort Advance.

"Kindness

"BUFFALO BILL, Chief of Scouts."

"Mr. Cody, if you will deliver that to Colonel Yulee, he will give you an answer."

"That answer you can bring to me by this stage coach, or you can give it to Reckless Ben to deliver to me."

"Upon the response of Colonel Yulee depends his daughter's freedom."

Buffalo Bill took the envelope and placed it in his pocket, while he said:

"Let me be your hostage, Major Mephisto, to gain what point you wish."

"No; Miss Yulee alone will do."

"I will go, Mr. Cody, so do not say more; but I suppose I can at least carry my traveling-satchel with me, if I am to be your prisoner, Major Mephisto?"

"Certainly, Miss Yulee, for my desire is to treat you in every respect as you deserve."

"Take me, sir, for I am an old woman, and she is a dear young girl who—"

"You won't do, madam," was the laconic response of the Hussar chief, though he added:

"I thank you, however, for your offer."

There was grim humor in this that seemed to assure Reckless Ben; but his smile faded when Major Mephisto said sternly:

"I am ready for my hostage, Miss Yulee."

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### RECKLESS BEN LOSES HIS LEADERS.

"I AM ready, sir," and Ethel Yulee was as cool as an icicle, as she stepped from the coach, after bidding her feminine companion good-by.

"I say, major, yer is kinder crowdin' things in doin' as you is now, takin' this young leddee a prisoner."

"I has stood up fer yer as ther gentlemanest road-agent I ever see, or heard tell on; but when yer takes a leddee from my coach I is down on yer fer keeps," and Reckless Ben spoke in very earnest tones.

"I mean the lady not the slightest harm, Ben, and I shall treat her with the respect that I would my mother; but I wish Colonel Yulee to grant me certain demands I have asked him in my note, and I take his daughter as a hostage to force him to do so."

"My father is not one to drive to do anything, you will find," said Ethel with spirit.

"Where his daughter, an only child, is at stake, he will yield, I think," was Major Mephisto's response.

"Well, I thinks it's a mean trick, and some day when I hears you is hanged, I'll be glad," said Reckless Ben.

The Hussar chief laughed lightly, and replied:

"Come, Ben, hand out the baggage that this lady wishes to carry with her."

"I am sorry I have no side-saddle for you, Miss Yulee, as you will have to ride."

"My own saddle I brought with me, and it is with the bridle and my riding-habit in that hamper," said Ethel.

She gave the key to Reckless Ben, and the articles were taken out, the maiden throwing the skirt over her head and fastening it about her waist.

One of the Hussars then dismounted, and the side-saddle and bridle were placed on his horse, and Ethel was lifted to her saddle by Buffalo Bill, who whispered:

"Keep up good heart, for I will be on your trail within the hour."

"Thank you," she whispered.

The satchel which the maiden wished to carry was then handed out and slung to the saddle of another of the Masked Hussars.

"You can drive on now, Ben, and, Mr. Cody, the sooner you deliver that letter to Colonel Yulee, that much sooner will his daughter regain her freedom."

"It shall be delivered in good time, Major Mephisto," was the scout's reply, as he raised his sombrero to Ethel.

Then Ben called to his horses and the coach rolled on, Buffalo Bill now on the box with the driver.

"Waal, pard, wasn't thet done prime?"

"Yes, Ben, that is a dangerous man to have on a trail," replied the scout.

"But hain't he a gentleman?"

"He certainly possesses very elegant manners."

"He nailed thet poor soldier."

"Yes."

"And he got ther colonel's darter."

"He has, indeed; but he may not be able to hold her."

"Not ef you takes ther trail, Bill; but lordy, hain't I glad ter meet yer, and say I knows yer now, for I has heerd o' you for years."

"Does yer know, I has heerd so much o' your doin's, I spected ter see yer jist whip out yer guns and begin on ther whole gang."

Buffalo Bill laughed, and replied:

"I have got some sense, Ben; but I wish you to do something for me."

"I'll do it, Bill."

"When we halt a few miles further on, I'll write a line to Colonel Yulee, and you send one of the men at the station at once with it, for I shall put Major Mephisto's note in it."

"I'll do it."

"And don't speak of Miss Yulee's being captured by the Hussars, but leave her trunks at the station, and her father will send immediately for them."

"I will also ask the miner and the old lady to say nothing about it, as it is best it be not

known, for the settlers might attempt a rescue and thwart what the colonel will do."

"That is so, Bill; but can you tell me how it is that this Major Mephisto can watch the five Overland Trails as he does?"

"Does he?"

"He, do indeed, for the drivers have all been stopped by him off and on, though my trail being the main line catches it the most."

"Well, Ben, we must solve the mystery in some way."

"Have you not a stage envelope with you?"

"I has, under ther seat-box, and paper, too."

The stage soon came to a halt, and getting out the paper and envelopes Buffalo Bill took a pencil and wrote a long note to Colonel Yulee.

In the envelope he placed the note of the Hussar chief, and sealing it addressed it to Colonel Yulee.

"Give a man this twenty-dollar bill, Ben, and tell him to push on with all speed for the fort."

"He will bring an answer, and it will be given to you."

"But how will you get it?"

"I will meet you on your back trip somewhere, Ben."

"All right, pard; but what is you goin' ter do now?"

"Deprive you of your leaders," answered the scout, with a smile.

"Lordy, Bill, but you is iron lightnin' about ter strike."

"I hope I will be able to strike right, Ben."

The horses were now unharnessed and the harness thrown upon the coach, and the saddle, bridle and pack-saddle of Buffalo Bill were handed out, along with his repeating rifle.

Ben helped him to rig out his horses, who seemed glad of the change, and then Grip bounded out of his place of hiding, where he had been securely hidden, his presence unsuspected by any one in the coach, or the Masked Hussars.

"Good-by, Ben."

"Good-by, Bill, and luck to yer," replied the driver, and the stage rolled on, leaving Buffalo Bill in the Overland Trail, but prepared for whatever might turn up in his way.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE TWO LETTERS.

BUFFALO BILL had been gone for some days from Fort Advance, and, since the soldier had returned, whom he rescued from the Hussars, they had had no news from him.

This caused some anxiety, for all understood that it was a case of one man against many, and the warning of the Hussars, the scout was the last man in the world to heed.

The colonel and Captain Vaughan often talked the matter over, and they were engaged in doing so one night, as was their wont before retiring, when the orderly came in and said:

"A courier, sir, and he says it is most important."

"Admit him."

The orderly disappeared to soon return and usher in a man in buckskin.

He looked like one who had ridden hard, and he said quickly:

"Are you ther colonel, sir?"

"Yes, my man."

"I has a letter here fer you as Reckless Ben give to me about sunrise ter give ter your own hands only, and he told me not to let ther grass grow under me while I were a-comin', and I didn't."

"Who are you, my man?" asked the colonel, as the courier was fumbling for the letter.

"I is Stable Joe, up at the old Hearse Station."

"And who is Reckless Ben?"

"Lordy! hain't yer heerd o' Reckless Ben?"

"No."

"Then yer is away back in ignorance, fer Reckless Ben are ther boss driver on ther Overland, and runs ther dog-gondest rainbow hearse I ever seen."

"He sails out o' Prairie City, and keeps clean through to Land End City, and—"

"But the letter."

"Yas, here it are, fer it got mixed inter my duds in some way, Pard Colonel," and the odd genius handed out the letter which Buffalo Bill had given to Reckless Ben to forward for him.

"He give me a twenty fer bringin' it too, and that's a answer to go back."

"All right, I will call you when it is ready."

"Orderly!"

"Yes, sir."

"Take Mr. Stable Joe out and have him given a good supper and his horse fed."

"Thet's music," said Stable Joe with a grin, as he followed the orderly, whom he seemed to think was a greater personage than the colonel.

Hastily breaking open the envelope, Colonel Yulee glanced at the contents and his face became pale.

Then he said:

"Vaughan, listen to this."

"It is from Cody," and he read aloud as follows:



"OVERLAND TRAIL,"  
2 P. M.

"COLONEL YULEE:—

"DEAR SIR:—I write on the Overland Trail stage which I came in from Prairie City.

"I booked as passenger there, but got Reckless Ben, the driver, to hitch my horses in as leaders, and to carry Grip also and my traps.

"When the prairie stage came in it brought four passengers, an old lady coming to the mines to see her son, a soldier of Captain Vaughan's command by the name of Jack Henry, a miner and your daughter.

"I made her acquaintance and rode in the stage, though I did not make myself known for reasons I deemed best.

"The soldier, I found, bore the tattoo-mark on his left arm, which has proven so fatal so far to five of his comrades, and I urged him to return, but he disregarded my warning.

"About three miles back from where I send this the Masked Hussars surrounded the coach—twelve besides the chief.

"The latter, Major Mephisto, spied the soldier, recognized him, forced him to show the fatal brand on his arm, and then took him out and shot him.

"The soldier died bravely, and gave me some papers to hand to Captain Vaughan.

"In begging for his life your daughter made known who she was, and Major Mephisto at once said that he would hold her as a hostage.

"It was not for gold, he said, and so it seemed, for not a dollar did he ask of any one.

"But it was for a purpose that he has written you.

"Your daughter had her side-saddle, bridle and habit along, and she took these, along with a sachel of clothing, and bravely went with her captor.

"I offered myself as hostage, but Major Mephisto would not accept me, so I could do nothing.

"After we had come this far I halted the stage, took out my horses in the lead, and I am now going to start on the trail of the Hussars, as Grip will easily lead me where I can see no signs.

"That I will do my best, you may understand, but I would like to know the demand made by Major Mephisto in his note to you, which I send within, for then I will be able to act more advisedly.

"Your daughter will be perfectly safe, I am sure, but the Hussar chief makes threats if you attempt to release her by force, so leave it to me to rescue her, and if I can do nothing I will quickly come and report to you.

"An answer returned by the bearer will come to me through Reckless Ben, whom I shall see on his return.

With respect,  
"CODY."

"My God! what a blow!" cried the colonel, as he finished reading the scout's letter.

"How fortunate, sir, that Cody was there!"

"Fortunate indeed! but I feel assured he will do all man can do.

"My poor child! how she must suffer."

"He will treat her with respect, sir; but what of Major Mephisto's letter?"

"True, what of his letter?" and the colonel quickly tore it open, though the brave man's hand trembled, as it did so, as no deadly peril to himself could have caused it to tremble.

In a bold hand was written as follows:

"OVERLAND TRAIL,"  
Friday.

"COLONEL ROYAL YULEE, Commandant Fort Ad-

vice:—  
"SIR:—This will be placed in your hands by your chief of scouts, Buffalo Bill, and I write to inform you that I have in my keeping your daughter, Miss Yulee, whom I will hold as a hostage until you grant my demand upon you.

"That demand is that you deliver into my hands an officer now in your command.

"If he is a man he will consent to it, rather than have me hold for one moment your daughter captive.

"If he is not, you will have to deliver him to me if you desire to see your daughter again.

"Let him ride out from the fort with Buffalo Bill, and meet me at the point from where I send this letter on Sunday next at noon.

"I will be there with Miss Yulee, and place her in charge of the scout.

"If you attempt to send others, my scouts will know, and you will thwart the end you wish.

"The one I seek is Lieutenant Hobart Otey.

"If you refuse, an answer will reach me if delivered to Reckless Ben, the Overland driver.

"I have the honor to be

"MAJOR MEPHISTO,  
The Masked Hussar."

For some moments neither the colonel or Captain Vaughan spoke, and then the former called out:

"Orderly!"

"Sir!"

"Ask Lieutenant Otey to come to me at once," and the voice of Colonel Yulee was hoarse with feeling.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### PUT TO THE TEST.

"WELL, Vaughan, this is most remarkable," said Colonel Yulee, when the orderly had gone after Lieutenant Otey.

"It is indeed, sir."

"What does it mean?"

"I am at a loss to know."

"I will find out when Otey comes, for he must know."

Captain Vaughan shook his head.

"You think not?"

"I hardly know what to think, sir."

"What can this man want with Otey?"

"I cannot ask him to give himself up to have my child returned to me."

"The Mephisto has struck the right chord,

Colonel Yulee, when he says that if he is not a coward he will do so."

"You think that he should?"

"Miss Yulee is suffering for some reason known to Otey, and therefore for him, and he should free her, at any sacrifice to himself."

"I am at a loss to understand it, sir."

"You think so?"

"I do, sir."

"Ah! here is Surgeon Powell, and I will see what he thinks, for I am glad he came in, as his level head always gives me good advice."

"Ah, colonel, I am glad to find you up, sir, for I felt anxious about Cody, seeing a courier arrive," said Frank Powell, as he entered.

"Sit down, Powell, and let me ask your advice."

"Read the letters, please," and he handed him the one written by Buffalo Bill.

As Surgeon Powell began its perusal the colonel said:

"Vaughan, ask the orderly to request Lieutenant Otey to await in your room a few minutes, if he should arrive before Powell reads the letters."

Captain Vaughan obeyed and returned to his seat, and his eyes, and the colonel's, were fixed upon the surgeon's face.

But no more than a wounded soldier could glance up into his face and read his fate; could they see there any expression of his thoughts.

His stern, handsome face was immobile, and he laid aside the scout's letter and took up the one written by Major Mephisto without the slightest expression revealing his feelings.

"Well, Powell?"

"Colonel, this is remarkable, sir."

"It is."

"Have you seen Otey?"

"I just sent for him."

"He can do but one thing."

"And that?"

"Give himself up."

"You think so?"

"By Heaven! Colonel Yulee, there is nothing else as a man that he can do."

"So Vaughan says."

"So any one but a coward would say, sir."

"It being my child that is in the hands of the outlaws, and one of my officers whom the demand is made upon, I am not a competent judge as to what should be done."

"I am, sir, and I say frankly that Otey is a coward if he hesitates an instant," hotly said the gallant surgeon.

"But this Mephisto may mean to kill him."

"It matters not, sir, he has no right to hesitate when Miss Yulee is held for his sake."

"But will he?" anxiously asked the colonel.

"He shall certainly not hesitate from not knowing what I deem it his duty as a man, a soldier, an officer to do."

"Nor mine," added Captain Vaughan, glad to be so strongly backed up by the bold surgeon.

"I am glad to have your opinion, so please remain, but say nothing until Otey has been thoroughly put to the test."

"Vaughan, please ask Lieutenant Otey to come in, for he is outside."

A moment after, Lieutenant Otey entered.

He looked a trifle pale, and seemed nervous at being sent for at so late an hour.

"I had retired, Colonel Yulee, and so was forced to detain you, sir," he said.

"You are in ample time, Lieutenant Otey."

"Be seated, please."

The officer obeyed, glancing quickly at Captain Vaughan and then at Surgeon Powell, to see what it all meant.

But their faces revealed nothing, and Colonel Yulee continued:

"Lieutenant Otey, I have here two very strange letters, and they concern me vitally, as well as yourself, and I desire that you read their contents thoroughly and see what is best to be done."

"This one is from Buffalo Bill."

The lieutenant took the letter, and his hand showed a tremor as he did so.

He read it through without a word, but when he was handed the second letter his face turned livid, and his hand trembled so he rested his arms upon the table.

"This is infamous, Colonel Yulee," he said, fiercely.

"It is, Lieutenant Otey."

"Why, that man is a fool to wish to get me into his power through holding Miss Yulee as a hostage."

"It is a remarkable proceeding, sir; but who is this Major Mephisto, Otey?"

"I cannot tell you, sir."

"Cannot, or will not?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Have you no enemy that you could place as this man?"

"None, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Unless it be—"

"Who?"

"That Sergeant Drew."

"Sergeant Drew was executed, Lieutenant Otey."

"It has never been proven, sir, that he was killed."

"He must have been killed, or wounded at least, and the Indians carried him off."

"His body was not found, sir."

"True; but why do you suspect this Major Mephisto of being Sergeant Drew?"

"I hardly know, sir."

"Why should Sergeant Drew be the soldiers' foe that this man is?"

"I cannot tell, sir."

"And what has Sergeant Drew against you now, Otey, if he be alive?"

"I do not know, Colonel Yulee."

"Well, Lieutenant Otey, what can we do in this matter?"

"I am at a loss to tell you, sir," was the low reply, and at his words the eyes of Frank Powell flashed ominously.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE REFUSAL.

LIEUTENANT OTEY seemed deeply moved at the position he found himself in, and he glanced furtively at the colonel, and then at the two other officers.

He saw that Colonel Yulee wore a stern expression, and Captain Vaughan had a sneer upon his lip; but the expression on Frank Powell's face he liked least of all.

"Lieutenant Otey, this is a most unfortunate affair, sir," said the colonel, breaking the ice after the last remark of the officer, which showed that he had not entertained the thought of going to give himself up to release Miss Yulee.

"It is indeed, sir."

"It seems that you could tell me more about this matter if you would."

"What more could I tell, sir?"

"That is what I wish to know, lieutenant, just what you can tell."

"I can tell nothing, sir."

"You surely know if you have any enemy who would do so desperate a deed to get you into his power."

"I suggested the sergeant, sir."

"He was not unfriendly to me, sir, so why capture my daughter, for I tried hard to save him?"

"Yes, sir, I know that the court-martial tried to prevent his execution, though compelled to sentence him."

"It was because they thought there were circumstances in the favor of the sergeant that did not come out at the trial."

"He held his lips, and you said nothing, and it was not understood how he could deliberately have run his sword into you, meeting you out in the timber, as he did, and then placed himself in jeopardy by bringing you home."

"I could not understand his strange action, sir."

"Unless it was manliness in him," quietly said Surgeon Powell.

"Well, Otey, what are we to do, for, be the man whom he is, he holds my daughter in his power on your account?"

"If you will let me take a company, sir, I will attempt her rescue."

"Buffalo Bill says nothing must be done."

"He is not the best judge, as he prefers to rescue her alone and thus add to his fame."

"Well, he has the pluck to attempt it against tremendous odds, Otey."

"True, sir; but why not let us at once begin a war on these Hussars?"

"Because five hundred men could not catch them in those mountain fastnesses, and, if driven to it, they would go to the renegade Red Heart, and thus escape."

"No, they must be taken by just such men as Buffalo Bill, and I believe that he, Hawk-Eye Harry, Poker Paul, and a few others like them, could accomplish what my entire force could not do."

"It may be, sir; but it is a pity to leave Miss Yulee in the power of this man a moment longer than is necessary."

"So I think," said Frank Powell, dryly.

"And I," added Grayson Vaughan.

"He says he will hold her until he gets you in his power."

"I shall take good care that he does not get me in his power, Colonel Yulee, for he would put me to death, I am sure."

"But what about Miss Yulee, who is held as a hostage for you, Otey?" asked Frank Powell.

"I can give no advice, for I do not know what to say."

"I could give a little advice."

"Well, Surgeon Powell?"

"I will not offer it as advice, for I never give advice unasked, but I will tell you what I would do if placed in your position."

"Well, sir?"

"I would go at once, find Buffalo Bill, ask him to meet the Mephisto with me, and deliver myself up, releasing Miss Yulee as a hostage."

"Are you aware, sir, that he would kill me, while Miss Yulee is in no danger?"

"Suppose he might, is it not better to take your chances, than to have Miss Yulee, a young girl of refinement and education, forced to remain among a band of outlaws in a mountain retreat?"

"By Heaven, Otey, but I'd rather give my



life than have a woman thus suffer for act of mine."

"But I have done nothing whatever to cause this."

"That is not the question, sir; he demands you in return for his fair captive, and you should go and surrender yourself, be the result what it may to you."

"I will first see what the scout accomplishes, for I have great hopes that Buffalo Bill can work wonders."

"Procrastination makes cowards of us all, Otey," hotly said Surgeon Powell.

"Do I understand you as referring to me as a coward, Surgeon Powell?"

"My dear Lieutenant Otey, if your mirror revealed you to yourself as I see you, you would not ask that question."

"Then you intend it as an insult?" hotly said Lieutenant Otey.

Frank Powell was now perfectly calm, and looking the officer straight in his face, he said, slowly:

"Otey, I have been mistaken for you often, as you have for me."

"We are the same size, the same form, and a bearing alike, while our faces are said to be as similar as though we were twin brothers."

"But if I thought my nature was like yours I would go out in the first thunder-storm and try to be struck by lightning!"

"This is outrageous, Surgeon Powell, and he insults me, Colonel Yulee, in your presence."

"I beg Colonel Yulee's pardon," and Frank Powell bowed low and turned to leave the room.

"And you shall take back your words to me, sir, or must abide the consequences," hotly said Hobart Otey.

Frank Powell turned, and said in the soft-voiced manner natural to him, and wholly unmoved:

"I never so far forget myself, Lieutenant Otey, to say aught to a brother officer that I have to retract—in fact, I never eat my words," and Surgeon Powell saluted Colonel Yulee and left the quarters.

## CHAPTER XL.

### THE CAPTIVE.

WHEN Ethel Yulee saw the stage-coach drive away and leave her alone, in the power of the Masked Hussars, her brave spirit almost sunk within her at the thought.

But she made up her mind to face the ordeal with a fearless heart, and she felt a perfect confidence in Major Mephisto, that he would treat her with the greatest respect.

Whatever his nature might be, in carrying out his vengeance, his cruelty in coolly taking the life of a human being, he certainly appeared the man to protect her, and not treat her with disrespect.

"I am ready, Miss Yulee, and permit me to express my deep regret at having to do as I have done, and the Hussar leader spoke in the tone of one who meant his utterances."

"I also regret it, sir; but I fear I shall have to remain long upon your hands, for my father is not one to sacrifice one of his officers, even to save his daughter."

"Miss Yulee, I feel that, but I have done as I did to try and force the officer I told you of, to come forward and rescue you by himself coming forward that you might be released."

"He will hardly do so, sir, where he knows that death awaits him, and I certainly would not wish it."

"It is very kind of you to say so, to offer to sacrifice yourself for him; but if he has the manhood I hope he has, he will certainly at once release you by coming and delivering himself into my hands."

"I shall urge against it, for better that should suffer inconvenience for awhile than that he should lose his life."

"Do you know any of your father's officers?"

"I met one, Captain Vaughan, several years ago."

"A splendid fellow he is too."

"Then he is not the object of your hatred, sir?"

"No, indeed."

"I am glad to hear this, for I have always like Captain Vaughan, and my father seems very fond of him."

"Yes, and from what I know of him he would be the man, if he was the one I had in view, to at once come and give himself up to free you, and Surgeon Frank Powell, Captain Talbot, and in fact many more would do the same."

"You seem to know the officers of the fort well, sir."

"I know some of them, and I think you will enjoy life there."

"Your father is a whole-souled gentleman and a perfect soldier."

"Captain Vaughan is one of Nature's noble-men, and he is a young bachelor."

"Captain Talbot is a fine fellow, but married, and Surgeon Frank Powell is a king among men, but is engaged to be married, I believe, to a lady East."

"Then there are plenty of younger officers, some older ones, and the garrison is a charming place to live."

"I am sorry that you prevent me from ascertaining how true your praise is."

"I am sorry, too, Miss Yulee; but I am determined to get possession of that man, and I feel that I can only do so through you; but see, is not this grand scenery about you?"

"It is indeed, sir; but may I ask where you are taking me?"

"To my retreat, the Home of the Hussars."

"Is it far from here?"

"Not very; but I am going to ask you to permit me to blindfold you, when we arrive a mile nearer, for should you escape and desire to lead a force against me, you would know just how to reach my home."

"I must submit, sir; but it seems a pity to shut out this beautiful scenery."

"It will but be for a short while, I assure you."

The scene about them was now grand, for they were moving down the mountain-side toward a beautiful valley.

Through it ran a river, in a bold, rocky bed, and at times with overhanging, cliff-like banks.

As they neared this river, Major Mephisto said:

"Now permit me to make a bandage of your veil, Miss Yulee."

She offered no resistance, and he securely bound it over her eyes.

After a ride of half a mile they came to where a chasm in the high bank formed a pathway to the river.

Here the Hussars dismounted, and the chief lifted Ethel Yulee from the saddle.

"Now, Miss Yulee, as we have to walk, and you are blindfolded, accept my arm, please."

He asked with the courtesy of a cavalier, and Ethel did as he requested.

It was quite a walk along the river-bank, the Hussars soon following on foot.

At last they came to where the bank was very high and precipitous, and the river rushed along many feet below.

A hundred feet away was an island, also with precipitous banks.

The island was rocky, and yet there was a heavy growth of timber upon it, while in the center were hills rising a hundred feet in height.

There were perhaps thirty acres on the island, but that human foot had ever trod there no one would have believed, had they not seen the manner of reaching it.

Arriving at a clump of trees that grew on the bank Major Mephisto placed a bugle to his lips and blew three sharp blasts.

Almost instantly they were answered from the island, and soon after a man appeared upon the other shore.

In his hand he held a huge bow, with an arrow set.

Without particular aim he fired, and the arrow fell near the group of Hussars.

Instantly one seized it, and there was a string attached.

Drawing upon it he soon held a rope in his hand.

Another arrow was then fired, and it too had a string attached, and which also was made fast to a rope.

Two Hussars then began to draw hard, hand over hand, while two more took up the arrows and fired them back to the island, where two men then seized them and began to draw in the rope, which had been passed around two trees near the bank upon the main shore.

Several Hussars were now drawing upon the ropes, and soon a narrow bridge was drawn across the river, the men on the island making their end of the ropes fast when it had reached well across.

The bridge was of ropes, with a bottom of small poles for the footing, and two hand-ropes, one on each side, protected the one who went across from falling.

It looked frail indeed, but it was substantial enough to hold half a dozen men at a time, and the time taken in throwing it across from bank to bank was not more than fifteen minutes.

"Now, Miss Yulee, come with me and have no fear."

"Place your hands upon the ropes you feel on either side and let me lead you."

Blindfolded as she was, Ethel obeyed, and though she knew the footing was frail, and she must be high over the river, she never quailed.

But a sigh of relief escaped her as she got to the island shore and felt firm land beneath her feet.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE HUSSARS' HOME.

AFTER leading Ethel a short distance into the interior of the island, Major Mephisto said:

"Now, Miss Yulee, I will relieve you of that bandage on your eyes."

As soon as she could see she glanced about her. She saw a pretty little woodland scene, a small vale, as it were, in the island.

There were horses just then passing near, and she saw that they and their trappings were dripping wet, which showed that they had crossed to the island by swimming, for she

recognized the animals as those of the Hussars, and among them the one she had ridden.

In the vale there were some rudely-built cabins, half a dozen in number, with one off to itself, which was larger and better than the others.

"Miss Yulee, there is your home while you are my guest," and Major Mephisto pointed to the cabin.

"It is a pretty spot," she said, really enjoying the little camp scene.

"Yes, and not an unpleasant home for hunted men."

"The cabin is mine, and you will find it comfortable, and you need not feel that you are inconveniencing me, for I can turn in with my officers, whose hut is equally as good—you see it there among those pines."

They had now reached the cabin, and the chief threw open the door, bowed, and walked away.

He had gone but a few steps when he turned and said:

"Miss Yulee, by glancing about you, you will see that I have quite a little band of Hussars, and their eyes will be upon you, should you attempt to leave the island."

"There is but one way you can reach it in safety, and that is the way I brought you."

"To attempt to leave it would be your certain death."

"If there is anything you need, simply call, and I will send you my cook who will prepare your meals and obey your bidding, in all except aiding you to escape."

Bowing, the chief retired and a man in uniform and mask soon after approached.

She could not see whether he was white or black, but he was polite, and it seemed to Ethel that he spoke with a negro accent.

He set about getting supper with the air of one who understood his business, and as Ethel gazed at the broiled quail, venison steak, coffee and biscuit she felt hungry in spite of her surroundings.

As the night was a little cool the cook built a large log fire in the cabin and lighted a lamp that hung over a table in the center.

There were bear and buffalo robes on the floor, several comfortable rustic chairs, a table, bed and cupboard that comprised the furniture, and on the walls, to the surprise of Ethel, she beheld some sketches and paintings executed with a most skillful hand.

Over the mantle was a frame that was curtained, and her woman's curiosity prompted her to draw back the little silk curtains on the gilt rod.

It was a portrait of a woman's face, and long and earnestly did Ethel gaze at it, for it seemed to fascinate her.

A knock at the door caused her to hastily cover up the portrait, and the Hussar cook entered with her supper.

It was a delicious supper, too, for a hungry girl, and Ethel was hungry, and did full justice to the meal.

After her appetite was appeased she continued her voyage of discovery around the cabin, and she came to the conclusion that whatever Major Mephisto might be then, he had been a gentleman in the past.

There were books in the cabin, and a guitar, and the latter Ethel seized upon with pleasure, for she played the instrument well and had a charming voice.

It was a relief to her to soothe her troubled soul in song, and she sung ballad after ballad, little dreaming that there were listeners without, men who were hunted by their fellow-men, and yet had tears in their eyes as they listened to her voice.

At last she tired of singing, tried to read, cast the book aside, and picked up a portfolio of sketches.

These entertained her for quite a while, and being an amateur artist herself, she was able to judge of the excellence of the sketches.

Then she felt tired and turned to her bed.

It had been prepared for her and was far from uncomfortable.

The fire burned brightly, and a curtain could be drawn across to shut out its light.

Putting out the lamp, she drew the curtain and retired, sinking to sleep almost immediately.

She slept well, and in the morning the songs of birds awoke her and she hastily dressed.

Her breakfast was soon ready, and thus began Ethel's captivity among the Masked Hussars.

After breakfast she started out for a stroll, but as she approached the river-bank she beheld a Hussar standing in her path.

Instantly she turned back, and several times tried it at different points, but each time she seemed to see that same Hussar in her path.

She spoke to him, but he gave no answer, and in fact seemed hardly conscious of her presence; but still he barred her way.

Thus the morning passed, while she listlessly gathered wild flowers in the glens.

At dinner the masked cook was on hand, and the meal was a tempting one.

She asked about the chief and was told that he had gone away.



She asked how many men there were on the island and she received no response.

Any questions regarding the band and the island were not responded to; but in all else the cook was most polite.

As she could get no information from inquiries, she determined to do so from observation, and she set about counting the men and horses on the island, though not appearing to do so, for, she said to herself:

"It may be useful, and I am sure that that daring and handsome scout has not deserted me."

And Ethel Yulee was right—he had not.

#### CHAPTER XLII.

BY SIGHT AND SCENT.

WHEN Buffalo Bill was left in the Overland Trail, he at once decided upon his course of action.

So sure was he that the Hussars would at once move to their retreat, wherever that might be, he did not hesitate to hastily gallop back to the spot where the coach had been halted.

Having seemed in no hurry to depart, Major Mephisto was not over a mile away from the spot when Buffalo Bill reached it.

"Take the scent, Grip, and what you cannot find out with your nose, I will try my eyes on," said the scout.

Grip seemed to understand fully just what was expected of him.

He had not been particularly pleased with his ride on the coach, and was now anxious to attend to business.

He was allowed to go ahead as far as the length of the lariat, and having taken the trail looked back at the scout with the air of one who knew it all.

"On, Grip."

And on Grip went, silently and surely following the trail, as though it was plainly visible to the naked eye.

At length it struck a rocky canyon, and but for Grip the trail would surely have been lost, for no track could be made on the hard soil.

Grip, however, went by scent, and so continued on until at length he came to the hill descending to the valley.

Instantly the scout drew back in the shelter of the thicket of pines, and hiding his horses took his field-glass and leveled it upon the valley.

What had caused him to draw quickly back was the sight of the Hussars in the valley.

He saw Ethel riding by the side of the chief, and the man whose horse she rode was riding behind one of his comrades, while another carried his saddle and bridle, and a third the sachel the maiden had brought with her.

Watching them closely through his glass, Buffalo Bill saw them halt at the river-bank.

Here all dismounted, and the horses, seeming to know what was expected of them, walked down a gully washed through the bank to the water's edge.

Here the scout lost sight of the horses, but he beheld the party on foot walking along the bank.

Arriving at the little clump of timber he saw them halt, and though too far to see just what was done, he beheld the rope bridge drawn across and the maiden and the Hussars cross on foot.

At the same time he saw the riderless horses landing at the upper end of the island and going up into the interior.

Once the Hussars had disappeared from sight Buffalo Bill beheld two men on the island release the bridge ropes, and gradually lowering on them the bridge, in some mysterious way, was dragged back to the island shore again.

"So far good."

"The horses go alone to the island; I suppose it is because the waters are too rough for them to carry a rider, and perhaps it is to prevent the horseman from getting wet through."

"The men come down the bank, give some signal, and the ropes are thrown across and the bridge is stretched."

"It is a clever little scheme; but I do not despair of getting upon the island."

"I'll camp just opposite to that bridge and then I'll know who comes to and fro."

"If I could only catch two of those Masked Hussars together, I think I could show them a little game that would surprise them."

So saying the scout returned to his horses, and mounting rode back along the mountain range.

At last, after a great deal of trouble, he reached a point opposite to the island, and where the bridge had been stretched.

His first care was for his horses, and he soon found them a most luxuriant place to feed and rest, with a spring at hand with the clearest, coolest water.

Grip was given the length of his lariat and left tied to a tree, and the scout made his way to a point of lookout and once more turned his glass upon the island.

Though he was upon a high piece of ground, he could not see within the island, only the impenetrable timber that shut the interior in as with a wall.

"The horses swim down, the men cross on that movable bridge, and the animals cannot get back against that current, so swim to a point below, I am sure."

"I must find that point to-morrow, as the Hussars may depart that way; but from here I can see pretty well who goes to or leaves the island."

"To-night I will have a close look at those banks."

Having decided upon this, as twilight was falling, the scout went back into the hills and prepared his supper.

Then he led his horses to water, staked them out for the night, and, unstrapping his pack, spread a small canvas covering, and made his bed beneath it.

Having completed his arrangements for comfort, he took hold of Grip's lariat and set out for the river-bank.

Arriving at the gully he saw that the horses had been trained to enter the river at that point and swim to the island.

Going down the bank opposite to the island he stopped in the little clump of timber, of half a dozen trees, where he had seen the bridge stretched across the stream.

Then the scout moved on down the stream, and after a walk of half a mile came to a break in the cliff-like bank.

Going down to the water's edge he saw that there was a good landing there for a horse that might seek to come ashore, and turning his glass up toward the island, he was sure that he had struck the spot where the animals swimming down from the island came out upon the shore.

Having satisfied himself upon how the horses reached the island and left it, and in regard to the means by which the Hussars crossed to and from the mainland, Buffalo Bill set out upon his return to his camp, hoping that the morrow would bring forth good fruit.

Nor was he disappointed.

#### CHAPTER XLIII.

A CAPTURE.

THE sun was rising when Buffalo Bill awoke, for he was fatigued after his eventful day and night, and had slept soundly.

His first care was for his horses and Grip, and then he ate a cold breakfast, for he dared not build a fire in the daytime, fearing that the smoke would be seen.

Then the scout went to his point of lookout, and leveling his glass upon the island, he was delighted to see a horseman just leaving it from the lower end.

It was a Hussar, and he rode into the water, and his horse waded for some time, but at last began to swim.

He could come out at but one place, the scout decided, so he hastily went back and got his lariat and Grip.

Making his way quickly along the ridge, he reached a point where he commanded a view of the spot at which the man would land.

Hardly had he reached there when the Hussar came ashore.

His horse shook the water from him as a dog does, and then was guided almost directly toward the point where the scout was in hiding.

Buffalo Bill's keen eyes soon took in the lay of the land, and he saw that the horseman could only go through a narrow canyon, as he was then going, for the mountain there was too steep to force a horse up its sides.

The canyon was several hundred yards away, but the scout hastily ran there and glanced over the steep sides.

It was about thirty feet at that point to the pebbly bottom of the canyon, but the rocky walls were almost perpendicular.

Further on the canyon grew wider and deeper as it penetrated the mountain.

Along the edge of the canyon grew some stunted trees, and to one of these the scout quickly fastened his lariat and then held the noose end well in hand.

"He is compelled to pass within reach," he muttered.

And then he motioned to Grip, who was anxiously watching proceedings, to lie down and keep quiet.

A moment more and the horseman appeared in sight.

He was a large man, and was mounted upon a fine bay.

He wore the brass helmet and mask, but the visor was raised above his mouth and he was singing a song as he rode slowly along.

His horse was dripping wet, but the horseman seemed to have kept his boots and legs dry.

Nearer and nearer he came, until he was right beneath the scout.

As he was passing on, the lariat was dextrously thrown and the noose settled over the head and shoulders of the Hussar.

Quick as a flash the coil was drawn tight, the startled horse bounded forward, and the rider, with his arms pinioned to his side, was swinging in mid-air six feet above the ground.

Bracing his feet firmly, the scout began to draw the heavy weight up hand over hand, while the Hussar, astounded, alarmed and helpless, could offer no resistance.

At length, by an exertion of superhuman strength, Buffalo Bill drew the Hussar over the edge of the cliff and said, as he hastily covered him with his revolver:

"You are my prisoner, my masked pard!"

"Buffalo Bill!" cried the man, in amazement.

"Yes; so men call me."

"I cannot understand it."

"Understand what?"

"How I was caught."

"The easiest way in the world, for I saw you leave the island, watched you land, and when you came in this direction, I knew you were my game."

"I own up I am caught; but none but you, Buffalo Bill, could ever have done it."

"You flatter yourself, pard, for plenty could had they gotten the chance."

"Well, what do you intend to do with me?"

"Kill you."

"No, Bill."

"Oh, yes."

"You would not do that."

"What! would not kill one of a band who murders soldiers in cold blood?"

"Well, Bill, I know your nature, and you are not a man to kill from love of seeing blood."

"How do you know?"

"I know you well."

"Who are you?"

"One you once rescued from the Indians."

"I have had that pleasure so often I cannot exactly place you."

The man raised his visor and his face was revealed.

It was the face of a young man, not ill-looking, but bronzed and a trifle reckless.

"Hal Watts, it is you?" said Buffalo Bill, recognizing a young teamster whom he had once rescued from a band of Indians who meant to torture him to death.

"I'm Hal Watts, Bill, and many a night have we been in camp together, many a long mile have I followed your trail when you were guide for the prairie schooners."

"And now you are an outlaw?"

"Don't call it too hard, Bill, for I get pay, and I'm simply soldiering under a captain who hasn't a commission; but, Bill, I have never forgotten you, and I never will."

"Better prove it by leaving this band of Hussars!"

"No, I'm enlisted for the war, and I can't desert."

"Unless death causes you to desert!"

"You wouldn't kill me, Bill!"

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"Don't carry that thought too far!"

The young man laughed and said:

"If I was armed and fighting you, I wouldn't give a Sioux scalp for my life; but as I am your prisoner, whom you have disarmed, you wouldn't harm a hair of my head, Bill Cody."

"I can take you to the fort, and there you will find they will hang you."

"No, Bill, for the sake of old times you would not do that."

"I suppose you think I will let you go, for the sake of old times?"

"If you don't, I'll be swung up, sure, and you wouldn't want to see that, I know."

The man had always been most kind to Buffalo Bill, had seemed to regard him with real affection, after his rescue of him from a horrible death, so that the scout had liked him greatly.

This the prisoner seemed to remember, and he took his capture with great equanimity.

"Come, Watts, I wish to know from you all about the Masked Hussars?"

"I am under oath there, Bill, and would die before I would tell you anything."

"Were you at the cabin when I was captured and taken there?"

"Yes."

"Were you there the night it was burned?"

"Yes."

"You escaped by the cellar?"

"We did, as you found out."

"Do you know that I went into the cave to the cellar?"

"Yes."

"And was struck there in the dark by some one?"

"Yes."

"Who struck me?"

"One of the men."

"He tried to kill me?"

"No."

"What, then?"

"He went back after some articles hidden there, and belonging to the chief, and your coming in cut him off from escape up the little tunnel-way."

"He therefore struck with his pistol to stun you and escaped."

"Was it the chief?"

"No."

"I gave you a surprise that night."

"You did indeed, but you have a way of surprising people and always did."

"Now, who is Major Mephisto?"

"The chief."

"I know that; but who is he?"



"Bill, I am under a death-oath to tell nothing, and I will die before I do."  
 "You know that Major Mephisto has a captive on the island?"  
 "Yes."  
 "How has he treated her?"  
 "With the utmost respect."  
 "I expected it of him; but, Watts?"  
 "Yes."  
 "I wish to aid that lady to escape."  
 The Hussar shook his head.  
 "I mean it, Hal Watts, I wish to aid that lady to escape, and what is more *you shall help me*," and the look of the scout showed that he meant all that he said.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

## A COMPROMISE.

BUFFALO BILL was not a man to take life when it could be avoided.

In fact, he frequently took desperate chances with his own life, rather than "make another grave," as he expressed it.

He had captured the Masked Hussar, Watts, and he meant to make use of the capture.

To do this he must have the uniform and helmet of his prisoner and, having these, know how to reach the island.

He had formed the bold determination to see the fair prisoner, Ethel Yulee, and tell her just what he was doing for her rescue, and, by learning the geography of the island, he knew he would be better able to act.

The prisoner was determined to tell no secret of the Masked Hussars.

He was bound by a vow not to do so, and Buffalo Bill knew his man so well that he was assured he would die before he gave away the secret of the band.

"Watts," he said, after a long silence:

"You must help me in this matter, for you know it is not right for your leader to hold that lady prisoner."

"It don't seem so, Bill."

"If Colonel Yulee wished he could lead his whole force here and crush you all."

"I could go and get men to come here and lay siege to the island, catching you all in there like rats in a hole."

"That's so, Bill."

"I could get the artillery from the fort here, cut off all escape, and in time hang the last one of you."

"I believe you."

"Now, I don't wish to do this, for your chief might say if we attacked him he would put Miss Yulee to death."

"Of course, if he did, no punishment would be too great for you all, for the soldiers would take the idea that you men had no right to allow him to do such a deed, and all of you would suffer."

"What do you want, Bill?"

"I wish you to show me how I can get on that island."

"You'd be killed."

"I'll take my chances on that."

"I could not show you, Bill."

"You can."

"How?"

"You do not suppose I would be such a fool as to go there as I am?"

"Well, how?"

"In your rig."

"No, Bill."

"I say yes."

The man shook his head.

"See here, Watts, I do not wish you any harm; but I'll take you straight to the fort unless we can come to some compromise."

"The soldiers are very much enraged at the action of Major Mephisto in shooting their comrades, and I assure you they would visit quick punishment upon you."

"I can't betray the chief, Bill, if I die for it."

"I don't ask you to betray him."

"What, then?"

"I wish you to let me have your uniform and helmet."

"Well?"

"Then when it comes night you can go with me to the place where they cross to the island."

"Better not risk it, Bill."

"That is my lookout."

"And then?"

"I wish to cross to the island."

"But what for?"

"To see Miss Yulee."

"Is that all?"

"Well, I would like to look about me while there."

The man again shook his head.

"I see you are stubborn; so we will go to the fort."

"Hold on!"

"Well, sir?"

"I was sent away on duty."

"You'll never get there, Hal Watts."

"Don't talk that way, Bill, for you scare me."

"I mean it."

"What would you do with me while you go to the island?"

"Leave you here in camp."

"Bill, will you promise not to betray me under any circumstances?"

"Yes."

"Will you simply go to see Miss Yulee?"

"I'll go to see her, but I'll not promise to go blindfolded."

"I suppose I will have to submit."

"You must, or go to the fort."

"Well, I'll compromise the matter, and let you have them."

"All right."

"But you must leave me free in camp here."

"No, I shall see that you are here when I come back."

"Then I refuse."

"It is better for you, Watts, should I be taken, for I can show that I captured you, bound you and took your rig by force."

"That's so."

"It would be best."

"And you would say so, Bill?"

"Yes, if I am taken."

"All right. I'll just get out of my clothes and you can then tie me and put them on."

"Wait until night."

"All right."

And so the compromise was made, with all in favor of the scout.

When it began to get dark the Masked Hussar took off his clothes and helmet, and Buffalo Bill put them on.

Then he tied the Hussar securely and said:

"Now for full instructions, Watts?"

"Take that little bugle hanging to my belt, and, when you get to the cliff-bank, blow three sharp blasts."

"If not answered very soon, blow again three times, and so on until you are answered; but you will doubtless soon have a reply."

"When you get a reply an arrow will be fired across the stream."

"Watch where it falls and pick it up; but before doing so get a bow out of the third large tree on the cliff."

"You will find it in a hole in the tree, level with your head on horseback."

"The arrow will have a string attached, so draw on it until two ropes come to your hand."

"Pass one of these around the nearest tree on your right, the other around the tree upon your left, and make the ends again fast to the string tied to the arrow, which you are to fire back across the river."

"Those on the other side will haul the ropes over and make them fast there, when they have dragged the end of the rope bridge up to your bank."

"The bridge has hand-ropes attached to it, which you are to make fast to trees on either side, and you can then walk across."

"And the men on the other side?"

"There may be only one on duty, but he will not speak to you; in fact our Hussars are not allowed to talk on duty, unless necessary to do so."

"Once you get across go straight toward the camp, and the chief's cabin is at the further end."

"Any guard there?"

"None, for none is needed."

"The chief is not there to-night?"

"No."

"And then?"

"See Miss Yulee, say what you wish and retrace your way; but, as you are going back, simply tell the man at the bridge that you will return in a short while."

"Well?"

"Cross the bridge, blow one blast when you are on this side, and the man will let go the ropes and haul the span back again."

"It is an ingenious affair, certainly."

"Yes, the work of the chief."

"Well, I shall be off now, and you may expect me back as soon as possible."

Mounting his horse Buffalo Bill rode out of camp upon his perilous mission, leaving his prisoner securely bound to await his return, and with Grip standing guard over him.

## CHAPTER XLV.

## IN THE LION'S DEN.

UPON leaving his camp the scout rode directly toward the spot where he had seen from the hills the Hussars cross the stream with Ethel Yulee.

He knew that he was taking big chances, but then he is one who enjoys danger, and never thinks of self where he can be of service to others or do a gallant deed.

He boldly rode up to the scattering clump of timber on the river-bank.

Drawing rein he listened for a few moments attentively.

The rush of the river, the cry of a night-bird, the wind sighing through the pines, and the howl of a wolf back in the mountains, reached his ears; but no sound of a human voice.

Then he raised the bugle to his lips and gave the three sharp blasts he had been directed to blow by the Hussar.

No response came, and he repeated the signal at the end of a minute.

Immediately it was answered, and then he dismounted and hitched his horse.

As he stepped again to the river-bank he

heard a whirring sound and an arrow fell near him.

He picked it up and found a small, but strong twine attached.

Drawing upon it, he at length came to where it was attached to two ropes.

These he divided and passed around the trunks of two trees, one growing on either side near the bank and twenty feet apart.

Then he got the bow, and attaching the strings to the ropes once more, fired the arrow across.

It was successful thus far, for the ropes began to draw, and after awhile a dark object came up to the edge of the bank and he pulled it over.

It was the bridge, and he soon had it made fast, along with the hand-ropes.

It was a frail-looking structure, yet strong; but it required a cool head and ready nerve to go across.

Still the scout was not one to grow dizzy, and he stepped boldly upon the rope bridge, and, accustoming himself to the swaying motion, went across.

A man stood upon the other shore, and though in camp he wore the uniform and helmet of the Hussars.

"I will return soon," said Buffalo Bill, and the one he addressed quietly sat down, as though to await his coming.

Passing on without hesitation, Buffalo Bill glanced eagerly about him.

A short walk revealed the camp, with several fires burning, yet so arranged under brush shelters as not to be seen away from the island.

By day the Hussars never allowed a fire to be built on account of the smoke betraying their presence.

Having discovered the arrangement of the camp, he spied the cabin of the chief and made his way thither.

If he was seen no one noticed him, for not one would have believed it possible that other than a Masked Hussar could enter the camp.

At last he arrived at the cabin.

The door was closed, but a light was within, and he tapped lightly.

"Who is it?" asked the voice of Ethel Yulee.

"Open the door please, for I have a message for you."

"Who are you?"

Buffalo Bill glanced about him, saw no one near and said:

"I am Buffalo Bill."

"Ha!"

He heard the exclamation, then the quick step, and the bar was taken down and the door opened.

Instantly he stepped within, but Ethel Yulee started back with a cry of alarm, while she said:

"You have deceived me."

"No, Miss Yulee, I am in this disguise."

He raised the helmet from his head as he spoke, and she saw that he spoke the truth.

"You are a brave man, Buffalo Bill, to dare what you have this night."

"It was the only way that I could get here to see you, so I captured a Hussar, and here I am; but I must return at once, as the man at the bridge is awaiting me, and he thinks I am one of the band."

"Oh! if you should be taken!"

"I think there is little danger; but I came to see how you were treated and to tell you that arrangements are being made to release you as soon as possible."

"Keep up a brave heart, and if we cannot get you free in one way, I will come as I have to-night and take you away."

"If I have to do so, my signal will be three knocks on the window to arouse you."

"But I hope we can release you without this risk."

"You are so good, Mr. Cody; but let me tell you that I am being treated well in every respect."

"Still, I long to be free and see my father, who I know is in great distress about me."

"But you must go now; so good-by—nay, do not remain a minute longer; and now that I have seen you, I have hope and shall not worry."

"Good-by."

She grasped his hand and he at once left the cabin.

He made his way along the line of camps, saw the officers' cabins and those of the men, and passed enough Hussars to cause him to mutter:

"Major Mephisto has a large force."

"Where did he get them all, I wonder?"

One man spoke to him, but he muttered an unintelligible reply and passed on.

"I've done enough for one night," he said, and he returned to the bridge.

The one who had sat down to await his return was still there.

"From my knowledge of red-skins, my idea is that this is one, for no white man has the patience to do what he has done."

"I will speak to him."

So said the scout to himself, and, emboldened by his escape thus far, he said:

"Any one gone over, pard?"

"Ugh!"



"I thought so," muttered Buffalo Bill, and he said in the Sioux tongue:

"Has any one else come over since I went by?"

"No," was the reply.

"That settles it; that pilgrim is a red-skin, and I believe nearly all of Major Mephisto's band are."

And Buffalo Bill stepped upon the rope bridge.

Crossing over, he released the hand-ropes, mounted his horse, returned the bow to its place, gave a single blast on his bugle and rode back to camp.

He found his prisoner just as he had left him, and Grip on guard.

"All right, Watts, I have been there, and all was as you said."

"You can go now."

Half an hour after Hal Watts rode away from the scouts' camp a free man.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

RECKLESS BEN DELIVERS TWO LETTERS.

RECKLESS BEN was on his back trip, and he had an empty stage.

His horses, however, seemed to miss the splendid leaders they had had on the up run, and often had to be encouraged with the crack of the whip.

"Horses is like humans; jest give 'em a leetle help and they expects it all ther time," said Ben, taking in the situation very quickly.

He kept his eyes open all the time, for he expected to be halted by both Buffalo Bill and the Mephisto.

"That Buffalo Bill is a great one, and I'm o' ther opinion he'll run that Major Mephisto out o' the road-agency biz' afore he is done with him."

"I expects ter see him afore long, 'cause he said as how he'd meet me; but then, he were alone and ther road-agents were many, and maybe arter all that he hev been tuk in."

"Ef so, I guess somebody got hoisted 'sides Buffalo."

A turn in the trail brought Reckless Ben in full view of a horseman.

"Therscout, as I are a-livin'!" he cried, excitedly, and whipping up his horses he was soon near where the scout was seated on his horse.

"Ho, Bill, I are as tickled ter see you as though I hed swallowed a feather."

"How is yer, how is yer?"

"All right, Ben; but the young lady is still in the hands of the Philistines."

"I am sorry about that; but you'll git her out and no mistake."

"I hope so."

"I knows it."

"Have you a letter for—"

"Now I has; it were sent over from ther fort."

Taking a letter from his pocket Reckless Ben handed it to Buffalo Bill with the remark:

"I has one for Major Mephisto, too, and I'd like ter know what are in it."

"Perhaps the colonel tells me what he has written to Major Mephisto," and the scout tore open his letter, which was addressed—

"FOR CAPTAIN W. F. CODY,

"BUFFALO BILL,"

"Chief of Scouts,

"OVERLAND TRAIL."

"Kindness RECKLESS BEN."

Opening the letter Buffalo Bill read as follows:

"MY DEAR CODY:—

"It was a bitter blow to me to know that my daughter had fallen into the hands of those wicked wretches, but a relief to me to feel that you were with her at the time and are now doing all in your power to rescue her."

"I know that what man can do, you will do, and my whole command would not accomplish by force what you can by strategy, so I am cheered with the hope of your bringing her to me soon."

"If you need men, you have but to go to some station and dispatch a messenger at any cost, and I will come myself with all you deem necessary."

"The officer whom this Major Mephisto demands, in return for my daughter, does not consider it his duty to free her by delivering himself into the hands of his enemies, or at least he wishes some little time to consider the matter, and that time I must grant."

"You will have a better chance to act in the mean time, and I will so write to Major Mephisto that he will consider it the intention of Lieutenant Otey to deliver himself up, on a certain day, say tomorrow, Sunday week, at noon, at an appointed rendezvous."

"I will keep you posted of all that occurs, by messengers to the station, and thence through Reckless Ben to your hands."

"In the mean time I will ask you to do all in your power to rescue my loved child from her peril."

"Vaughan joins me in remembrances and good wishes to you. Your friend,

YULEE."

Buffalo Bill read this letter attentively, and then gave Ben an idea of its contents.

"Now, Ben, I must go back to my camp and reconnoiter as soon as I know if Major Mephisto comes alone to get his letter from you."

"If he does I ask no greater luck; but if he is not alone, then I shall remain out of sight, you may rest assured."

Ben laughed and said:

"I hopes he may be solitary, Bill; but good-

by, and it's just three miles from here to whar I'm goin' ter meet Major Mephisto."

The coach rolled rapidly on, and Buffalo Bill followed at a canter.

He knew a trail that would cut off a mile and bring him near the scene, and he took it.

Approaching the spot where the Hussar chief was supposed to be, he dismounted and crept to a commanding position.

He had just reached his place of refuge when he heard the stage coming, and saw the Hussar chief ride out to meet it.

But he was not by any means alone, for his twelve horsemen were with him.

"That settles it," said the scout, and regaining his horse, he rode rapidly away.

In the mean time Major Mephisto had received his letter from Reckless Ben.

It was short and to the point.

"FORT ADVANCE, Saturday.

"SIR:—You have done an act in the capture of my daughter which places you outside the pale of manhood, and for which I shall visit upon you the severest penalty when I have taken you prisoner, for sooner or later you will be in my power."

"Your terms, for the restoration of my daughter, I have considered, and consulted with Lieutenant Otey about, and he desires until tomorrow, Sunday week, at noon, in which to deliver himself up to you, but it will be arranged just when and where, the communications being sent to you through Reckless Ben the Overland driver."

"I warn you that my child must be treated with the respect she deserves, and if otherwise, it will be the worst for you and yours."

"If you can think of any other arrangement for the restoration of my daughter, than the giving in to your hands of Lieutenant Otey, communicate with me."

"ROYAL YULEE,

"Commandant Fort Advance."

This letter the Hussar chief read carefully through, and then said to Reckless Ben:

"There is no answer other than that I shall expect Colonel Yulee to surrender Lieutenant Otey into my keeping on Sunday next."

"He'll do it, if he says so, you kin gamble on that, pard," responded Ben.

"Can you tell me where Buffalo Bill is?" asked the chief.

"Waal, now, I cannot, fer he left me at ther station and returned to ther fort," responded Ben, without the shade of a blush at the lie he told.

"Well, you just say to him that I warn him to keep off the trail of the Masked Hussars, for having spared his life on several occasions, when he has been caught dogging our steps, it is growing monotonous."

"Pard, I won't tell him, fer he's jist ther man ter strike yer trail if I does; but good-by, and bad luck to yer."

The Hussar chief laughed, and waved his hand as Reckless Ben drove on, muttering to himself:

"Now, he war too mean to come alone; but like as not Buffalo Bill hev got his eye right on him now."

"It's jist like him, and ef he hed come alone, I guesses ther colonel's darter wouldn't be a prisoner very long."

"Waal, thar is goin' ter be music afore long, and it are my opinion them Hussars will hev ter pay ther fiddler!"

## CHAPTER XLVII.

THE MIDNIGHT VISIT TO THE FORT.

THAT he might understand the situation more fully, and also relieve the mind of Colonel Yulee regarding his daughter, Buffalo Bill decided to make a trip to the fort.

He found a spot on the bank of a stream that ran through a wild canyon in the heart of the mountains where he could stake his extra horse out for the thirty-six hours that he would be absent.

He placed him so that he could get water from the stream, and the grass about him was most luxuriant and in great quantity, so that he would not need for food.

Some time before it was dark he mounted Hussar and set out for the fort, which he hoped to reach by midnight.

He pushed forward at a fair pace through the mountains, and reaching the prairie, urged Hussar on at a rate that he knew the horse could stand.

So well had he calculated that it was but a few minutes after midnight when he rode into the fort and asked to see Colonel Yulee.

He was taken by the officer on duty at once to the colonel's quarters, while his horse was given into the charge of a soldier with instructions to rub him down for an hour and then feed and water him, for the noble animal had brought his master a long journey in splendid time.

Colonel Yulee was just about to retire, and the scout was admitted at once into his bedroom.

"Bless you, Cody, this is indeed a pleasure, but you bring me no bad news, I hope, of my child?"

"None, sir, but, on the contrary, good news."

"You have not rescued her?" and the colonel grew excited at the thought.

"No, sir, but I have seen her."

"Seen her?"

"Yes, sir, I paid her a visit."

"What! you dared invade the retreat of those men?"

"It was not difficult, sir, the way I managed it."

"Ha! you found some traitor in the band?"

"No, sir, but I captured a man, and found one whom I knew, and had once served well."

"He would not betray his comrades, but he compromised by telling me the way I could reach the island, on condition that I would do no harm, and simply visit Miss Yulee to cheer her up."

"Of course he meant that I should set him free when I came back from the island."

"The island?"

"Yes, sir, for they have the best retreat I ever saw, on an island in a river that runs through cliff-like banks."

"Tell me of it, Cody."

"There is a place, half a mile above the island, where the cliff has split, and this permits one to ride down to the water."

"The river flows rapidly, and by riding in the current bears you directly to the island point, which is shoal and sandy."

"An Indian showed the secret to Major Mephisto, the man I captured told me."

"But the Hussars send their horses through that way, alone, and they take their saddles and go down opposite to the island where they have a rope bridge they throw across."

"The river gets them drenched, and so they prefer the bridge."

"But how did you discover all this?"

"I had my horses in the lead of Reckless Ben's stage-train, and was a passenger when Miss Yulee was kidnapped."

"After the Hussars rode off with her I took my horses and started on their trail; so, from the mountains, with my glass, I saw their little game to get to the island."

"I took that way of becoming a passenger in the coach, that I might leave the stage after we had gone on and trail them."

"A splendid idea; but did they take my daughter across this rope bridge?"

"Yes, sir; and blindfolded her to do so."

"The villains."

"Oh, sir, they have been most respectful to her, I assure you, and blindfolded her as they did not wish her to know the secret of getting to their retreat."

"When I compromised with my prisoner I dressed up as a Hussar, and having obtained instructions from Hal Watts I went at night to the bank opposite the bridge."

"I followed his instructions to the letter, and the bridge was thrown across from the other side, and on it I crossed, telling the man in charge that I would return soon."

"Cody, Cody! what chances you took?"

"Oh, no, sir, for I was a Hussar, you know, and I went straight on to the chief's large cabin, which he had given up to Miss Yulee."

"I knocked on the door, and when I told her who I was she unbarred and opened it; but she was greatly alarmed when she beheld me in the garb of a Hussar."

"I quickly told her how I had gotten on the island, and that she must keep up her spirits, for all was being done for her that could be, while, if we could not arrange otherwise, I would capture another Hussar, visit the island again, and carry her away over the bridge."

"She sent her love to you, and wished me to say that she was being treated with marked respect, while she lived on the best the Hussars could get for her."

"God bless you, Cody," said the colonel, with emotion.

"I did not tarry very long, sir, I assure you, and arranged a signal, so that if I had to cross the bridge and rescue her I could do it."

"I counted the men in camp as well as I could, and the major has fully half a hundred; but my idea is that they are Sioux Indians from the renegades' camp, excepting a few white men who are the officers, and thus it is that he appears to be on the five Overland trails about the same time."

"With the men in camp, and those evidently kept on the different trails, he must have at least a hundred, and ninety of them at least are Sioux."

"You surprise me, Cody."

"Well, sir, that is my idea, and yet he has the Sioux well drilled, and under perfect discipline."

"He is a remarkable man."

"He is, indeed, sir; but when is Lieutenant Otey to give himself up?"

"Cody, I do not think that Otey has the slightest idea of doing so."

"And yet he calls himself a man?"

"True, but he feels that it is certain death for him to do so, while he says the Hussars will not dare to harm Miss Yulee."

"He has no right to allow her to remain there as a hostage for him, even if he was sure they would hang him."

"So Surgeon Powell told him, and I fear there will be trouble between the two, for you know what Frank Powell is if aroused in a good cause."

"Yes, Otey will find him more dangerous



than he would Major Mephisto," said the scout.

"Well, I will write a letter to this Mephisto, by you, for you can give it to Ben, the driver, and I will make an appointment to deliver Otey to him on Sunday next.

"This will keep matters quiet, and Otey appointed that time, though he has no idea, I believe, of carrying it out.

"Still, I may misjudge him.

"In the mean time, if you can rescue Ethel, do so, but do not risk too much.

"If you can rescue her, it will be far better than having Otey go and give himself up, and terms with these outlaws are not to be made if it can be avoided."

"This is the best plan, colonel, and I will carry back your letter to-morrow, as I shall start about noon on my return."

Thus it was arranged, and after dinner the following day Buffalo Bill started upon his return to the mountains, Surgeon Powell and Captain Vaughan accompanying him for half a dozen miles upon his way.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### THE CHALLENGE.

THERE was bad blood among several of the officers at Fort Advance.

It was engendered by the action of Lieutenant Hobart Otey, in declining to give himself up to the Masked Hussars, and thus at once free Ethel Yulee, who was held as a hostage on his account.

Colonel Yulee had been placed in a position where he could not say much to the officer, but Grayson Vaughan had allowed the lieutenant to know his views, Captain Talbot had done the same, and Surgeon Powell had expressed himself in a manner so plain that Hobart Otey could not misunderstand his meaning.

The fact was that Surgeon Powell's high sense of honor made him speak out, and he was just the man, if placed in a like position to Lieutenant Otey, to spring upon his horse and go to the Hussar camp to deliver himself up to his enemy, cost it him his life or not.

"There will be trouble between Powell and Otey yet, Vaughan," Captain Talbot had said to the adjutant the day following Buffalo Bill's visit.

"Otey will have to make it then, for Powell has said all he intends to, and that was enough to make a parson fight, so he will not refer to it again, and it rests with the lieutenant to resent it, or not, as he deems fit."

"He is a good deal of a bully, I have thought, and he knows his man, I guess; but he had best not force trouble with Frank Powell, for though our surgeon is the meekest-tempered man in the fort, and as mild-mannered as a woman, he is the worst man to arouse I ever saw."

"You are right; a friend can walk over him rough-shod, as long as he does not touch him in a tender spot, and if so, look out; but do you think Otey intends to give himself up?"

"No."

"Nor do I."

"What will Buffalo Bill do now, I wonder?"

"He will rescue Miss Yulee, my word for it, if some arrangement is not made soon; but here comes Powell."

Surgeon Powell now joined the two officers, who sat in front of Captain Talbot's cabin, and Grayson Vaughan asked:

"Well, Frank, what do you think Cody will do?"

"If he catches a Hussar, whose clothes will fit him, he'll get Miss Yulee out of the hands of Major Mephisto before Sunday comes."

"So I think," replied Captain Vaughan.

"And I," added Captain Talbot.

"But do you think Lieutenant Otey will give himself up?" asked the adjutant.

"Not I, or he would never have allowed himself to remain under the stigma of coward," was Surgeon Powell's quiet reply.

"You certainly spoke to him very plainly, Frank."

"I spoke as I felt, for I cannot understand a man allowing a young and lovely girl to remain in the hands of those outlaws, and not at once going and surrendering himself to free her, be his fate what it may."

"You are right."

"Yes, you are."

Such was the verdict of the two officers, and Surgeon Powell had just begun to speak, when Lieutenant Otey turned the corner and came toward them.

"Sh!" said Grayson Vaughan.

"There is Otey," whispered Captain Talbot.

But Frank Powell continued with what he was saying, without a change of muscle, simply adding:

"I was just speaking of you, Lieutenant Otey, and as I never say behind a man's back what I fear to say to his face, and you have appeared at this moment, I shall go on with my remarks."

"I was saying, Vaughan, that Lieutenant Otey knew his duty in this matter as well as any man, and his coward heart caused him to shirk it."

"He has asked for time to consider, and Colonel Yulee has granted it, though he had to compromise himself by writing to Major Mephisto and requesting a favor of him, an extension of time."

"But my opinion is that Lieutenant Hobart Otey will not then do as a brave man, a gentleman and an officer should, for it is not in him."

Lieutenant Otey had heard every word, and his face flushed and then paled.

He was a fine-looking man, in fact, strangely like Surgeon Powell in face and form, only there was not the manly, determined look in his countenance that was stamped in every feature of Surgeon Powell.

The lieutenant showed vacillation and cunning in his face, rather than the stamp of noble manhood.

But he was noted for his courage, and neither Grayson Vaughan or Captain Talbot could see how he could eat the words thus thrown in his teeth.

They knew that Surgeon Powell was seeking no quarrel, and that he would not have said what he did, had not Lieutenant Otey appeared and found him talking of him.

Then, like the brave man he was, he kept on.

They knew that he was one to avoid trouble, and had merely expressed his views in the matter, as they had come from his heart and upon impulse under excitement.

But could Hobart Otey allow the brand of coward to remain upon him?

That was the question, and the two captains glanced at him anxiously to note the result.

They were far removed from civilization, out in a border fort, and when a man there acted in a cowardly manner he must expect to hear of it in very plain language.

"Captain Talbot, as I would like this matter to remain a secret among those who now know it, for I believe, outside of ourselves now present, and Colonel Yulee, no one else at the fort is aware of the capture of Miss Yulee, I will ask you to act as my friend in the affair which must be arranged between Surgeon Powell and myself."

"Will you do so, Captain Talbot?"

"Under the circumstances, Otey, I cannot refuse."

"Then I leave it in your hands to challenge Surgeon Powell to meet me, and to arrange weapons, place and time," and Hobart Otey turned on his heel and walked away.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### THE DUEL.

WHEN Lieutenant Otey walked away an unpleasant silence followed his departure.

Frank Powell did not show the slightest sign that aught had occurred to mar his serenity; but Captain Talbot and Grayson Vaughan looked annoyed, and in fact, deeply pained.

At length Captain Talbot said:

"You heard, Powell, what I was commissioned to do, and I accepted the unpleasant duty that, as Otey said, the secret might not become known to others."

"Do your duty, my dear Talbot, independent of any feeling of regard you may have for me," was Powell's response.

"Then I shall have to challenge you, in the name of my principal, Lieutenant Hobart Otey, to meet him upon the field of honor."

"I will accept, Captain Talbot, the challenge of Lieutenant Otey, though I regret exceedingly that it is necessary to do so."

"I spoke impulsively at first, and it angered me to see an officer hang fire when placed in the position in which he was."

"I cannot retract my words, for they are true, so I refer you to Captain Vaughan, whom I must ask to act for me."

"Certainly, Powell, and we will see what we can do to arrange it, for if Otey goes to Major Mephisto to deliver himself up, and thereby free Miss Yulee, you will withdraw your charge of cowardice?"

"Willingly, and beg his pardon, too."

"Then we will go and see him, so please wait here."

The two officers departed, and they were gone a very long while; but Frank Powell was reading a book and smoking, as though indifferent to the passing of time, or what the result of their interview with Lieutenant Otey would be.

When they returned their faces showed a lack of success.

"Well?" simply said the surgeon.

"I am sorry, Powell; but Lieutenant Otey says the affair cannot be arranged."

"That he has told Colonel Yulee what he will do as regards Major Mephisto, and that as you have called him a coward you shall answer for it."

"As he pleases."

"Talbot suggested the fact that he might be dismissed the service for fighting a duel, and he said that he had already sent in his resignation."

"As I have, and it has been accepted; but, as you know I am acting surgeon now at the

request of Colonel Yulee, who requests me to remain until his surgeon and his assistant arrive."

"So you see neither Lieutenant Otey nor myself have aught to fear."

"Well, the affair must go on, so I will ask as to your choice of weapons, time and place?" Captain Talbot said.

"As to weapons, I do not care what are used, rifles, revolvers or swords; but suppose we say, as to time, to-night, at sunset over on the ridge yonder," and Surgeon Powell pointed to the timber-ridge from whence the Sioux had made their charge upon the evening when Sergeant Drew had been marched forth to execution.

Captain Vaughan and Captain Talbot at once agreed upon the place and time, and revolvers were the weapons chosen.

Then Captain Talbot went off to notify Hobart Otey, leaving Grayson Vaughan and Surgeon Powell together.

"Not a word of this to Colonel Yulee, Vaughan, until the affair is over."

"Certainly not, for he might put you both under arrest."

"He would do so, I am sure, and if it was to be prevented, I would like it done in some other way."

"I am sorry for Otey, for he is a clever fellow enough; but then he is tricky, I am sure, and there is that in his past life I believe he wishes hidden."

"I shall not kill him, unless he forces me to do so."

"Remember he is a dead shot too, Frank, and quick as lightning in his aim."

"So I have seen in his pistol practice; but Talbot without doubt consulted him as to weapons, when he knew any were suitable to me?"

"Yes, and Otey prefers pistols, as he said the wound given him by Sergeant Drew had weakened him in his sword-arm."

"I hoped he would have chosen blades, for I could have disarmed him and given him his life, for I do not wish his life on my hands, and revolvers are more deadly."

"Well, though he challenged you he had his choice of weapons; but now I must go over to the colonel's and see what there is to be done."

"I will call at your cabin for you in ample time."

So saying Grayson Vaughan went over to headquarters.

The colonel had gone off for a ride on the prairie, the orderly said, and a note had just been brought by a soldier who said it was important.

"Who was the soldier, orderly?"

"Faith, sir, I was not after takin' notice o' him, for they is all the same in looks."

The young captain smiled, and entering the colonel's quarters took up the note.

It was addressed:

"MOST IMPORTANT!"

"FOR COLONEL YULEE."

The writing was bad, the spelling worse, and it read:

"There will be a fight with pistols betwene Doc Powel & Leutinant Hobert Oty at the Timber Rige near the perade ground at sunset."

In his capacity as adjutant, Grayson Vaughan had a right to open the letter, and a glance showed him that it was written in a disguised hand.

"Heaven forbid that I wrong Otey, but I believe he wrote this, in this style, to appear to come from one of the men, that Colonel Yulee might have Powell and himself arrested."

"I will just keep this until after sunset."

And he placed it in his pocket.

At the appointed time Captain Vaughan went to the cabin of Surgeon Powell and they mounted their horses and rode out upon the prairie.

Soon after Captain Talbot and Lieutenant Otey followed them, and the four met on the ridge, on the very spot where he had received his severe wound at the hands of Sergeant Dudley Drew.

It had been agreed that the surgeon and lieutenant should stand thirty paces apart, and at the word should each march ten paces forward, halting at marks placed for them.

Then, their revolvers being in their belts, the word should be given to draw and fire.

As they were awaiting their call to position Captain Talbot said in a low tone to Surgeon Powell:

"Vaughan says you intend to show mercy; but he vows he will kill you."

"Thank you."

And Frank Powell walked to his stand, throwing his cigar away as he did so and wholly unconcerned.

Hobart Vaughan also took his stand, but his face was white and he had a wicked look that boded no good for the surgeon, for it plainly said:

"I know I am a dead shot and that I can draw quickly, and I intend to kill you."

"Gentlemen, are you ready?" called out Grayson Vaughan, who had won the word.

"Ready!" came the response from each.

"Forward, march!"

"Halt!"



"Draw and fire!"

Quick as he was, the weapon of Lieutenant Otey was not leveled when the crack of Frank Powell's revolver was heard.

The lieutenant staggered back, tried to take aim at his foe, who stood motionless and calm, and then pulled the trigger.

The bullet missed its mark, and Hobart Otey fell to the ground.

Instantly Frank Powell was at his side and said in a kindly tone:

"Will you let me see to your wound, Otey, for I did not wish to kill you?"

"Yes, but I feel that I must die."

"Tell me the truth."

Frank Powell examined the wound carefully, and then said, sadly:

"You must die, Otey, and God knows I regret it."

"I feel that you do, Powell, and I deserve it at your hands; but I have something to say to you, if these gentlemen will leave us alone for a few minutes."

Captain Talbot and Grayson Vaughan at once retired, and the dying officer said in a low voice:

"I have a confession to make, and you must set me right after I am dead."

"It is in my pocket, so read it and do as you deem best."

Five minutes after, Frank Powell called to the two officers, for Lieutenant Hobart Otey was dead.

## CHAPTER L.

### RECKLESS BEN'S PASSENGER.

RECKLESS BEN was considerably taken aback when he saw the stage from the prairies come in and the only passenger to get out, a young and beautiful lady.

She had a face that was touching in its sadness, very winning and lovely, and a form that was exquisite.

She was dressed in a neat traveling costume, carried a small trunk, and seemed well supplied with funds, as the proprietor of the cabin hotel said, for he saw her purse when she paid for her dinner.

"She's a beauty, Ben, and a leddy, and ther Lord only knows why she have come out to these rough parts."

"But take good care of her, for she deserves it," said the driver with whom she had come to Prairie City.

"May I ride up on the box with you, sir?" she asked Reckless Ben, with a sweet smile.

"Sart'in, miss, fer ther whole huss is yourn ef yer wants it," was the gallant reply.

So the fair passenger climbed gracefully up to the box, Ben made her as comfortable as he could, and the team was started for the mountain trip.

Reckless Ben never felt so proud in his life, and he only wished that he had had time to put on his best rig and look his best.

He handled his reins with an air that showed he felt his importance.

"You have a wild country through, here, sir," volunteered the fair passenger.

"Yes, miss, it's as wild as they make 'em."

"And dangerous traveling, too?"

"Yes, miss, but don't you be skeert."

"Oh, no. I have come here to travel extensively through the country, if I do not find one I seek at Fort Advance."

"Is you goin' ter Fort Advance, miss?"

"Yes, that is my destination."

"Yer'll hev ter ride on horseback some leetle distance from ther station nearest the fort."

"Yes, I prepared for that by bringing a saddle, bridle and riding habit."

"Your head were level, miss."

"Thank you; but I suppose I can buy a horse?"

"I has a horse at ther station, miss, which I'll lend yer ter ride to ther fort on."

"You are very kind; but I would prefer to purchase a horse, as then I can go as I please; but I would like to hire a man to guide me there, and a pack-animal to carry my little trunk over."

"I'll see to it, miss, and get yer a good outfit, so yer will hev no trouble."

"Do you know many of the officers at the fort?"

"Some of 'em, miss, for I knows ther colonel, and Buffalo Bill—"

"You mean the great scout of whom so much is heard in the East?"

"Yes, miss, he's ther boss of 'em all as a scout, guide, Injun-fighter, and everything else I guesses thet he sets ter do out in this wild land."

"And who else do you know, sir?"

"Thar's Cap'n Vaughan, and he's a mighty fine gentleman as well as a soldier, and then thar is Surgeon Frank Powell, who kin do anything but raise ther dead, they say, as far as med'cine is consarned, and ther boys calls him ther Magic Doctor, while ther Injuns names him ther Mighty Med'cine-Man, and they is right."

"Do you know Lieutenant Hobart Otey?"

"Ther young feller as was nearly kilt by ther sergeant?"

"What, was he wounded?" quickly asked the lady.

"Waal, miss, he pretty nearly turned up his toes to ther daisies, and no mistake."

"Please tell me about it, I beg of you."

"Maybe yer knows him?"

"Yes, I have met him," and the face of the lady showed deep feeling from some cause.

"Waal, miss, he hev lately come to the fort, and thar was a sargint thar, whose name I disremembers, and they met on the perarer and ther lieutenant were nearly kilt."

"But, though the sergeant knowed it would be death ter him, he tuk ther lieutenant to ther fort, and he were tried fer wounding his superior officer and sentenced to be shot."

"This was terrible; but what excuse did he have for wounding Lieutenant Otey?"

"Neither one of 'em would say."

"That was strange."

"Yes, miss, and they marched out ter shoot ther sergeant jist at sunset, when Buffalo Bill rid up, as they was firin' and had a pardon from General Custer; but the sergeant fell, and then Buffalo Bill told ther colonel ther timber was full o' Injuns, an' ter git fer ther fort."

"They got, but the Injuns whooped down on 'em, and but fer ther fort openin' with ther big guns, they'd have been massacred."

"And the sergeant was killed?"

"Waal, they hain't seen his body since, I hears, and it's nateral to suppose he were kilt."

"And Lieutenant Otey?"

"He got well o' his wound, but thar's ther devil ter pay—I beg pardon, miss, but I means thar is trouble now about him, as he's wanted by Major Mephisto," and the curiosity of the sad-faced lady was so great that Reckless Ben gave her the whole story of Ethel Yulee's capture by the Hussars, and how she was held as a hostage until Lieutenant Hobart Otey would give himself up to Major Mephisto.

The fair passenger seemed deeply impressed with all she heard, and she kept Ben's tongue busy until they arrived at the stage station nearest to Fort Advance.

Then Reckless Ben brought his horse forward, and she paid him a handsome price for it.

Her saddle and bridle were gotten out of the boot, and she hired a pack-horse to carry her baggage, Stable Joe having the honor to act as guide and scout, and receiving a snug sum in advance for his work.

Ben waited until he saw her start all right for the fort, and then he drove on his way, making the stage-horses suffer for the hour he had lost there in getting the pretty lady off for Fort Advance.

## CHAPTER LI.

### FOR LOVE AND GOLD.

"THAR'S a soger ahead now, and I guesses as he's from ther fort, miss," said Stable Joe, as he spied in the distance a horseman, when they had arrived within a few miles of Fort Advance.

"Then let us try and overtake him, and I can let you go, for I saw that it was hard for you to get away from your post, while, as this pack-horse is yours, I will buy him from you, if you will sell him to me."

"I'll sell him, miss, if you wants him bad enough to pay a hundred dollars, fer I hain't got much else in ther world than him."

"I will pay you that sum, and twenty-five more, for I am a good judge of horse-flesh, and he is worth it," was the reply, and she took her purse and counted out the money.

"You handles yer dust awful reckless, miss, for it won't do in this country," said Joe.

"I know when I am with honest people," she answered, with a smile, and then added:

"That soldier has seen us, and is waiting for us."

"Yas, miss."

"He looks like an officer."

"Yas, miss, he is, for it's Surgeon Powell, him as ther boys calls ther Magic Doctor."

"I heard Reckless Ben speak of him; but what is he doing alone, and so far from the fort?"

"Scoutin' or huntin' game, miss, for he does both."

In a short while they rode up to where Frank Powell sat upon his horse awaiting them.

As they drew near the lady saw that he was no ordinary person, and a glance into his fine face gave her confidence in him.

The surgeon raised his sombrero politely as she approached, and said pleasantly:

"Joe, I thought you had Miss Yulee with you, but I see that I am mistaken."

"I regret your disappointment, sir, for I have heard of Miss Yulee's capture; but I am Mrs. Hobart Otey, the wife of an officer at Fort Advance, while you are, I believe, Surgeon Powell?"

"Yes, madam."

And Frank Powell bowed again.

She had spoken pleasantly, her manner was so fascinating and her face so beautiful that he was at once won over to liking her, while, though his surprise was great, for he did not

suspect Lieutenant Otey of being a married man, he did not reveal his amazement to her.

She had not noticed the slightest change in his immobile face, and then asked:

"May I request that you serve as my escort to the fort, Surgeon Powell, so that this good man may return to his post?"

"Willingly, Mrs. Otey, and it will be a pleasure to serve you."

Joe was accordingly dismissed, and as Frank Powell threw the lariat of the led horse over his saddle-horn the two rode on together.

There was something in the face of Frank Powell that caused the lady to trust him thoroughly, and she said after they had ridden a short distance in silence:

"Surgeon Powell, you no doubt think it strange that I should come here alone, as I am doing, and to shield myself I intend to place confidence in you, for I shall need an adviser, a friend, when I reach the fort, as my husband not only does not expect my coming, but believes me dead."

"Indeed, madam, you can trust me as you would a brother; but would it not be better to first see Colonel Yulee, and to give him your confidence?"

"No, I prefer to tell you all that I have to say, for already it seems as though we were friends, and my motive in coming to the fort is to force my husband to restore to me my property, and to free myself from him, for he has brought upon me more misery than often falls to the lot of one poor woman in this world, and pardon me if I say I abhor and, yes, hate him."

She had spoken before Frank Powell could check her, or he never would have accepted the confidence forced upon him.

Now that he knew how she was situated, he felt that it was his duty to tell her of her husband's death, whereas he meant to leave it to Colonel Yulee to do so.

"Mrs. Otey, as you have said what you have, let me now tell you that you are already divorced from your husband."

"What do you mean?" she asked, quickly.

"A higher Power than an earthly court has divorced you," he said, impressively.

"He is dead?"

"Yes, madam."

"When did he die?"

"Three days ago."

"So late as three days ago?"

"Yes, madam."

"From the wound given him by a sergeant, as I heard from the stage-driver?"

"No, from a wound received the day he died."

"How was it?" she asked, in a low tone.

"He was killed in a duel."

"Ha! I could call that man my friend who killed him, after what he has done against me," she said, with flashing eyes.

"Mrs. Otey, let me no longer deceive you—your husband fell by my hand."

She started, her face paled, and for a moment she was silent, having drawn her horse to a halt.

Then she said:

"Tell me all, I beg of you."

In his low, soft-toned voice he told her all, and how no one had known Lieutenant Otey as a married man.

Then she said:

"Surgeon Powell, I never loved my husband, for I was engaged to another whom I did love with all my heart."

"That other I believed was dead, slain by Indians Hobart Otey said, and he urged me to marry him, and my parents also begged it, and I became his wife."

"He got possession of my property, took me far from my home in Texas, and began a series of persecutions that nearly drove me mad."

"At last he said I was mad, and a physician, hired with my money, swore to it, and I was sent to an asylum as incurable."

"I had some money hidden away on my person, and some diamonds, and I bribed an attendant to let me escape, and it was given out that I sprung into the river and committed suicide."

"But I returned to my old home, and at last I learned that my old love had been seen alive, and more, that the man I married had bribed men to kill him."

"Then I decided to act against Hobart Otey, and my uncle supplying me with money, I started upon his track and came here to find him."

"Now, sir, you know why I offer you my hand and say let us be friends."

Frank Powell was deeply moved by the story of the wronged wife, and he felt less scruples of conscience at having slain so vile a wretch as Hobart Otey had proven himself.

Learning from her the name of her old lover, he became more interested in her and said:

"You shall have a warm welcome at the fort, Mrs. Otey, but for the present let all that has passed between us be a secret, and in good time you shall know my motive in asking it."

Helen Otey promised, and soon after they rode into Fort Advance, and the young widow became Colonel Yulee's guest.



## CHAPTER LII.

## THE SCOUT AND THE RENEGADE.

WELL aware that Major Mephisto knew of his presence in the mountains, and that he could but be there as a spy upon the movements of himself and his Hussars, Buffalo Bill felt that it was necessary for him to use the greatest caution not to be surprised.

It had been his desire to remain in the vicinity of the Hussars' Island as long as he could, before starting for the fort to carry out the contract to deliver to Major Mephisto Lieutenant Otey in return for Ethel Yulee, for he was watching every opportunity that might present itself to rescue her and thus not have to deliver the officer into the hands of his foe to be killed.

The scout was in hopes that he might again run across Hal Watts, or capture some other of the Hussar band, for, were he able to do so, he made up his mind to play a bold game for the rescue of the maiden.

"If I can only catch one of those Masked Hussars," he said to himself, as he sat in his lonely camp, looking out from his point of observation, "I would play a game that I think would win."

"I would not hesitate if there were two of them, or even three of them together, for it would be worth the risk."

"They have done no great harm, excepting the executions their chief has ordered, and I hate to fire on them to kill, as I would if they were regular red-handed road-agents or Indians; but I would like to bag one of them."

"I'd dress up in his uniform the same as I did before, and go down to the bridge crossing, signal to have them send it over, and say that Major Mephisto sent me after the prisoner."

"She would recross the bridge with me, I carrying her saddle, for I would tell the guards the major told me to bring a horse that way for the lady, not wishing her to leave by the river and thus get wet."

"Once I had her across in the timber I would soon make for the fort."

"This is a good scheme I've got, but I've got to catch a Hussar to carry it out."

The scout sat musing over his scheme for some little time, and then he started, his face lighting up, as he spied afar off a horseman.

"There comes a Hussar, as sure as I am alive, and he is alone, too."

The horseman was at considerable distance from the scout's position, and he was moving along in a direction that evidently meant he was making for the Hussars' retreat.

Turning his glass upon him, after a long look, Buffalo Bill said aloud:

"That is not a Hussar, as I thought, but an Indian."

"Now, what is he up to, and how many more are behind him?"

"Well, he has got to pass my hiding-place, and if he is alone I'll just draw a bead on him and have a little chat in choice Sioux with him."

The horseman came along at a dog-trot, and as he drew nearer the scout kept his glass constantly to his eye.

Grip sat near him also interested in the coming of the horseman, to judge from his appearance, and both were hidden amid a group of rocks around which grew some stunted pines.

The trail that the man was following would bring him within twenty feet of the scout.

Suddenly the face of Buffalo Bill lighted up with real pleasure, and he said, eagerly:

"Now, I like him better than if I caught a Hussar."

"They are frequent in these parts, but that kind is scarce and come high."

"But, at whatever price, I must have him."

The horseman was now almost up to the scout, who laid his revolver upon the rock by his side, tightened his belt, threw up the rim of his sombrero, and then resumed his weapon.

As the man was nearly opposite, the scout muttered:

"It's a pity to kill the horse, but it's the surest way to bag him."

With his last word he threw the revolver forward and fired.

With the report the horse fell dead, and his rider was caught with one leg beneath him, quick as he had been in his effort to prevent just such a catastrophe.

Before the man was hardly on the ground the scout had bounded from his position and stood over him with a revolver at his head, while Grip stood by as though anxious to catch him by the throat.

"Max Melmer, you are just the gentleman I have been longing to see."

"Buffalo Bill!" groaned the renegade, feeling that resistance was vain.

"Yes; and I am happy to meet you again."

"What do you want with me?"

"To take you to Fort Advance."

The man looked as though he meant to risk the bullet and endeavor to escape; but Buffalo Bill said quickly:

"Grip, watch him."

The hound growled, and the renegade cried in terror:

"Call off that red-mouthed brute, for God's sake."

The scout bent over and took the weapons from the man, and then he dragged the dead horse off of his leg, Grip still watching him with anxious eyes.

Then he tied his hands behind his back, took the saddle and bridle off of the dead horse, and told the prisoner to walk up the mountain ahead of him.

He soon came to his camp, and placing the saddle of the renegade upon the pack-horse, he distributed the contents of the pack-saddle upon both animals, after which he mounted his own steed and led the way along the ridge, just as the sun was setting.

"Come, Melmer, we have a long ride before us," he said.

"Where are you taking me?"

"To Fort Advance."

"What for?"

"To deliver you over to Colonel Yulee."

"He will hang me."

"If he don't he will not do his duty."

"Say, Bill?"

"Well?"

"I know where there are some gold-mines, and I'll take you there, if you'll let me go."

"No, sir, I'm not mining just now; but where were you going when I saw you?"

"To see a friend."

"Major Mephisto?"

"How do you know?"

"There is where you were going, and you cannot lie out of it, for I know where his Island is."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I'm on visiting terms with the Hussars; but what did you want with him?"

"I won't tell you."

"Who is he?"

"It is none of your business."

"Oh, I don't care to quarrel with a dying man."

"Dying man?"

"Yes, for you are about the same as dying, for the colonel will soon hang you."

"Bill Cody, you promise to let me go and I'll tell you all about the Hussars' Island?"

"I know."

"I'll tell you who he is, and all about him."

"No, I'll find out without making terms with you; but now keep still, for we must ride more rapidly," and the scout pressed on at a canter.

## CHAPTER LIII.

## THE SURGEON'S PLOT.

WHEN the sun rose over Fort Advance the sentinel on the log tower saw two horsemen coming across the prairie.

He instantly called to the corporal of the guard and reported the fact to the officer of the day.

It happened to be a young lieutenant, who turned his glass upon the horsemen and at a glance recognized Buffalo Bill.

His companion had the appearance of an Indian, with his feathers and gorgeous attire, but also seemed to have a long beard.

Word was at once sent to Captain Vaughan and Surgeon Powell, who quickly arose and dressed, and when the scout and the renegade rode into the fort they met them at the gate.

"Back again, Bill, and in great luck, I take it," said Surgeon Powell, glancing at the renegade, whom he had seen before.

"Yes, Doc, I've got Red Heart, the white chief of the Sioux," answered the scout.

A wild cheer broke from the group of soldiers at this announcement, and the renegade's face became ashen in hue.

"Here, lieutenant, take this man to the lock-up, and remember, he is the renegade chief, Red Heart, so put him in irons and place a double guard over him," said Captain Vaughan, and he then escorted Buffalo Bill to Colonel Yulee's quarters, Surgeon Powell accompanying them.

The colonel had heard the excitement and was nearly dressed, for he was in hopes that the scout had brought him his daughter.

But he greeted him warmly and congratulated him upon his capture, adding:

"I shall give that scamp just ten days to make his peace with Heaven, and then he shall hang for his crimes, and I believe it will put down this war feeling again breaking out among the Sioux."

"It will, indeed, Colonel Yulee, and I believe that the renegade was on his way to the Masked Hussar to ask his aid in a war on the settlements when I captured him," and the scout told how he had captured Red Heart.

"But you have had no news from my poor child, Cody?" sadly asked the colonel.

"No, sir, but I have been watching closely, hoping to be able to carry out a little plan I had formed," and Buffalo Bill made known his plot to catch a Hussar, rig himself out in his uniform, and go by night to the island, in the absence of Major Mephisto, and play a bold game to get Ethel out of the power of the Hussars.

"Cody, if you caught the Hussar, I feel that you would succeed, after having once successfully gone on the island and returned; but do you think that Major Mephisto will keep his appointment for Sunday?"

"Without a doubt, sir."

"But, Cody, I cannot keep mine."

"Indeed, sir, does Lieutenant Otey still refuse?"

The colonel looked at Surgeon Powell in a pained kind of way and Frank Powell said quietly:

"The fact is, Bill, Lieutenant Otey did not intend to give himself up, and not liking my words on the subject, he resented them and sent me a challenge."

"I accepted, and—"

"Of course he's dead; he might have known better than to face you, Doc," bluntly said the scout.

"And I am deeply pained over the affair, Cody, as I feel that Powell did but right, all circumstances considered, but I fear it may not be so regarded at headquarters; but then, Surgeon Powell had, as you know, already resigned his commission to go East and get married, and was only remaining at the fort out of kindness, until his successor arrived, and this may mitigate matters."

"I feel that I am a private citizen, colonel, and the affair will not be pushed when it is known in all its bearings."

"But this appointment with Major Mephisto must be kept."

"Where is the use, Powell?" asked Captain Vaughan.

"Well, as Bill had formed his little plans for the rescue of Miss Yulee, I have also one, and with his aid it can be most cleverly carried out."

"What is it, Doc, for I am ready," said the scout.

"It is just this, that I go with you on Sunday and impersonate Lieutenant Otey."

"I look very much as he did, and at twenty paces off no one would know the difference."

"Now this appointment is for noon on Sunday, and at a place you know well, Bill."

"As I understand it, you were to go there with Otey, and Major Mephisto was to escort Miss Yulee to the rendezvous."

"You, Cody, and the Hussar were to halt fifty paces apart, and Miss Yulee and Otey were to ride forward, pass each other and each join the other's escort."

"Is not that so?"

"Yes, Doc."

"Now I will go with you to impersonate Otey, and, passing Miss Yulee, will join the Mephisto, while she joins you."

"You can instantly ride off with her, while I will join the Mephisto."

"He will quickly recognize the cheat and shoot you, Powell, so I cannot consent to this," said Colonel Yulee.

"Colonel, Cody has known me for some time, and he will tell you that I can draw as quick as any man when it means life or death."

"But there will be no trouble, for I will call out to Major Mephisto that I came in his place as he is dead."

"Then I will explain certain matters of interest to him, and I'll guarantee to break up the band of Masked Hussars, if Buffalo Bill will help me."

"I'm with you, Doc, every time."

"Well, I wish Captain Vaughan's aid too, and I'll explain my plan fully as we go on our way, for you, captain, must accompany us a part of the way and act as an escort to Mrs. Otey, whom Bill does not yet know about."

"When Bill has Miss Yulee under his charge, he is to ride to where he can meet you, and then, at sunset, he is to meet me at a point where I will join him, bringing with me the Mephisto, and you, Cody, must have with you Mrs. Otey."

"Such is the outline of my plan, and I'll guarantee that it will go through without fail," and though the others did not yet comprehend what was back of Surgeon Powell's words, their confidence in him convinced them that he intended to carry through to success what he undertook.

## CHAPTER LIV.

## FRANK POWELL'S TRUMP CARD.

It was Sunday morning, and a cavalcade was going through the mountains at a rapid canter.

In the lead rode Captain Grayson Vaughan, and by his side was Buffalo Bill.

Next came the two fort scouts, Poker Paul and Hawk-Eye Harry, and behind these was Surgeon Powell, and by his side a sad-faced but beautiful woman, who sat her horse superbly and was listening attentively to something that Frank Powell was telling her.

That lady was Helen Otey, the wronged wife of Lieutenant Hobart Otey.

Behind these came a sergeant, corporal, and twenty-four gallant troopers.

Arriving at a good camping-place the party came to a halt, and all dismounted save Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell.

Then farewells were said and the two rode on, leaving the lady and the troopers in the little camp.



A ride of an hour brought the two to the summit of a hill, a range over which the trail ran into a small valley beyond.

Reaching the top of the hill they drew rein, and Frank Powell said:

"You think there is no doubt of Major Mephisto's coming, Bill?"

"None, for there he is now," and Buffalo Bill pointed across the valley.

"Yes, and Miss Yulee is with him."

"She is, so we will ride forward and meet them."

"And you remember, Bill, what I am to tell him, and you are to meet me at this same place this evening, with Mrs. Otey?"

"Yes, we will be here."

"If I am not here, Bill, you will understand that he is not willing to come and has vented his anger upon me?"

"I understand, Doc, and woe be unto him if he does," was the reply of the scout.

They had ridden forward as they were talking, and so had Major Mephisto and the one with him, whom the scout, through his glass, said was certainly Miss Yulee.

Halting at a safe distance, Buffalo Bill called out:

"Major Mephisto, are you willing to surrender your hostage for the officer now with me?"

"Gladly," came back the response.

"Go forward, Doc, and go slow," said the scout, and as the surgeon rode toward Major Mephisto, Ethel Yulee was seen to advance also.

The Hussar chief and the scout sat motionless upon their horses.

The maiden quickened her gait slightly, and doffing his sombrero Buffalo Bill wheeled alongside of her while Surgeon Powell was yet several lengths of his horse from the chief.

"I congratulate you, Miss Yulee."

"Come, let us hasten," said Buffalo Bill.

"You are so kind, Mr. Cody; but, oh, how I feel for that poor officer, and yet his face expressed no fear as he passed me, and he raised his hat so politely."

"I did wish to shake hands with him, for Major Mephisto will kill him," and Ethel glanced back anxiously.

"No, Miss Yulee, there is no danger, I think; but as we ride along I will tell you just what we have done."

And the scout also looked back and saw Surgeon Powell and Major Mephisto confronting each other.

As Frank Powell approached the Hussar chief the latter was certainly deceived, for he said in an exultant tone:

"At last you are in my power, Hobart Otey."

"Major Mephisto, Lieutenant Otey is dead," said Surgeon Powell, calmly, as he drew rein by his side.

"Ha! you are not he?"

"No; I tell you he is dead, and I come in his place."

"Yes, I know you now; you are Surgeon Powell."

"I am."

"And you are strangely like that man."

"True."

"And do you mean that he is dead?"

"Yes."

"Who killed him?"

"I did."

"You?"

"Yes."

"How and why?"

"In a duel, and on account of a quarrel because I said he was a coward not to give himself up at once and release Miss Yulee from your power."

"Surgeon Powell, I thank you, and yet you have deprived me of killing a man I have longed to see die for years."

"I have a confession that he left for me, strange to say, and if you will ride on with me I will tell it to you."

"He confesses to having stolen from you the maiden you loved, by representing that you were dead."

"He was a surveyor in Texas then, he said, and met the lady at her father's ranch, and he loved her, though he knew she was engaged to you."

"You, he said, were on your ranch, a day's travel away from her home, and, determined to win her, he sought a certain band of desperadoes and paid them well to carry you off and kill you."

"He, and every one, supposed that you were dead, and in time the lady, urged by her parents, became his wife."

"Haunted by the memory of what he had done, and angered that his wife should often speak of you, while he wished full control of her fortune, he had her placed in a lunatic asylum, from which she escaped and committed suicide."

"It was about this time that he got, through political influence, an appointment in the army and was ordered to the border, where he met you as a sergeant at Fort Advance."

"His duel with you, and your sentence he also told, and he was convinced that you had not

been killed that night, and were really Major Mephisto."

"He was right; I was wounded, but very slightly, though one bullet stunned me."

"I revived, and went with the Indians, for I spoke their language, and I knew Melmer the Renegade."

"He made me a chief at once, hoping I would turn renegade also, and I had the chance to save Buffalo Bill, and also to keep Captain Vaughan and his men from being massacred."

"But I was revengeful, and I organized the band of Hussars, only five of them white men, all the rest being Sioux Indians."

"I have watched the Overland Trails to capture the six men whom Hobart Otey hired to kill me."

"They belonged to a band of desperadoes known as Prairie Pirates, and all of them had tattooed upon their arms the skull-and-crossbones in black, encircled by a red chain."

"They were hunted so hotly that they fled up north and joined the army, and, tracking them, I joined the army, too, to find them, and thus met Hobart Otey again."

"Those six men were all sentenced to death, and a reward offered for them dead or alive, so I did no wrong in executing them, as I have proof of just who they are, and my executioners were Indians."

"What they made me suffer words cannot express, for they carried me to Mexico and had me thrown into a prison where I languished for two years."

"Now you know that Otey robbed me of my intended wife, caused her to take her own life, and that he paid men to have me killed."

"He is dead by your hand, and those men are dead by my order, and I am content."

"But there is one thing, sir, that you are mistaken in, and that is your believing that she who was Helen Marsden is dead."

"Great God! does she live?" and the strong man reeled in his saddle.

"She does, for she escaped from the asylum and remained in hiding, fearing Otey would put her back."

"At last she determined to defy him, and so she came West to seek him and force him to give her a divorce upon papers which she had against him."

"Death had already divorced her, and she became Colonel Yulee's guest at Fort Advance, where she is now, not ten miles from here, with Captain Vaughan."

"Thank God! Surgeon Powell, you have made a new man out of me."

"Come, let us ride to my den and let me send my men away, for no longer shall I hide my face as Major Mephisto, the Masked Hussar."

## CHAPTER LV.

### CONCLUSION.

WHEN Buffalo Bill rode back to the rendezvous that afternoon, he saw Frank Powell and Sergeant Dudley Drew approaching at a gallop, for the latter no longer wore his helmet mask.

The scout drew rein and Surgeon Powell did the same, while the soldier and the woman he had loved rode rapidly toward each other.

The meeting was one to affect the most iron-hearted man, for both had suffered, and again had met after long years of separation.

After awhile the soldier called to Surgeon Powell to approach, and the three going forward met Buffalo Bill, when all four rode rapidly back on the trail to the camp of the troopers.

The welcome that the sergeant got from Grayson Vaughan and his men made his heart glad, and that night around the camp-fire he told Captain Grayson, Ethel and the scout what Surgeon Powell had been told.

The next morning the party started for the fort, and there was no happier man in the wild West that day than was Colonel Royal Yulee, and he made Sergeant Drew his guest, at the same time saying:

"As you were executed, that was your discharge from the army, and if you are dead, as you were so reported, you certainly cannot be Major Mephisto, the Masked Hussar."

Soon after the return to the fort, Surgeon Powell went East to claim a bride, and Dudley Drew accompanied him, leaving Helen Marsden the guest of Ethel Yulee until his return.

Upon his return, six months after, there were two marriages at the fort, for Ethel Yulee became Mrs. Grayson Vaughan, and Helen Marsden was wedded to the man from whom she had been so cruelly separated for years.

The "best man" on the occasion of this double wedding was the Detective Scout, who had been appointed Chief of Scouts to General Royal Yulee, who never tires of telling the story of Buffalo Bill's best trail in hunting down Major Mephisto, the Masked Hussar.

THE END.

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What Parts Friends. For two little girls.  
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The Evil There is in it. For two young boys.  
Wise and Foolish Little Girl. For two girls.  
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Above the Skies. For two small girls.  
The True Heroism. For three little boys.  
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Afternoon Calls. For two little girls.  
Ned's Present. For four boys.  
Judge Not. For teacher and several scholars.  
Telling Dreams. For four little folks.  
Saved by Love. For two boys.  
Mistaken Identity. For two males and three females.  
Couldn't Read English. For three males, one female.  
A Little Vesuvius. For six little girls.  
"Sold." For three boys.  
An Air Castle. For five males and three females.  
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Evidence enough. For two males.  
Worth and Wealth. For four females.  
Waterfall. For several.  
Mark Hastings' Return. For four males.  
Cinderella. For several children.  
Too Much for Aunt Matilda. For three females.  
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The Double Stratagem. For four females.  
Counting Chickens Before They were Hatched. For four males.

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The Dark Cupid. For 3 Gentlemen and 2 ladies.  
That Ne'er-do-Well. Two males and two females.  
High Art. For two girls.  
Strange Adventures. For two boys.  
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A Practical Exemplification. For two boys.  
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Monsieur Thiers in America. For four boys.  
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A Frenchman. For two ladies and one gentleman.  
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Rhoda Hunt's Remedy. For three females, one male.  
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Cheery and Grumble. For two little boys.  
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Does it Pay? For six males.  
Company Manners and Home Impoliteness. For two males, two females and two children.  
The Glad Days. For two little boys.  
Unfortunate Mr. Brown. For one male, six females.  
The Real cost. For two girls.  
A Bear Garden. For three males and two females.  
The Busy Bees. For four little girls.  
Checkmate. For numerous characters.  
School-Time. For two little girls.  
Death Scene. Two principal characters and adjuncts.  
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Confound Miller. For three males and two females.  
Ignorance vs. Justice. For eleven males.  
Pedants All. For four males.

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The Goddess of Liberty. For nine young ladies.  
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A Strange Secret. For three girls.  
An Unjust Man. For four males.  
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The Friend in Need. For four males.  
The Hours. For twelve little girls.  
In Doors and Out. For five little boys.  
Dingbats. For one female and three males.  
The Pound of Flesh. For three boys.  
Beware of the Peddlers. For seven mixed characters.  
Good Words. For a number of boys.  
A Friend. For a number of little girls.  
The True Use of Wealth. For a whole school.  
Gamester. For numerous characters.  
Put Yourself in His Place. For two boys.  
Little Wise Heads. For four little girls.  
The Regenerators. For five boys.  
Crabtree's Wooing. For several characters.  
Integrity the Basis of All Success. For two males.  
A Crooked Way Made Straight. Gentleman and lady.  
How to "Break In" Young Hearts. For two ladies and one gentleman.

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Poor Cousins. For three ladies and two gentlemen.  
Mountains and Mole-hills. For 6 ladies and spectators.  
A Test That Did Not Fail. For six boys.  
Two Ways of Seeing Things. For two little girls.  
Don't Count Your Chickens Before They Are Hatched. For four ladies and a boy.  
All is Fair in Love and War. 3 ladies & 2 gentlemen.  
How Uncle Josh Got Rid of the Legacy. For two males, with several transformations.  
The Lesson of Mercy. For two very small girls.  
Practice What You Preach. For four ladies.  
Politician. For numerous characters.  
The Canvassing Agent. For 2 males and 2 females.

Grub. For two males.  
A Slight Scare. For 3 females and 1 male.  
Embodied Sunshine. For three young ladies.  
How Jim Peters Died. For two males.

### Dime Dialogues, No. 27.

Patsey O'Dowd's Campaign. 3 males and 1 female.  
Hasty Inferences Not Always Just. Numerous boys.  
Discontented Annie. For several girls.  
A Double Surprise. For four males and one female.  
What Was It? For five ladies.  
What Will Cure Them. For a lady and two boys.  
Independent. For numerous characters.  
Each Season the Best. For four boys.  
Tried and Found Wanting. For several males.  
The Street Girl's Good Angel. 2 ladies & 2 little girls.  
A Boy's Plot. For several characters.  
"That Ungrateful Little Nigger." For two males.  
If I Had the Money. For three little girls.  
Appearances Are Deceitful. Several ladies & 1 gent.  
Love's Protest. For two little girls.  
An Enforced Cure. For several characters.  
Those Who Preach and those Who Perform. 3 males.  
A Gentle Conquest. For two young girls.

### Dime Dialogues, No. 28.

A Test that Told. For six ladies and two gents.  
Organizing a Debating Society. For four boys.  
The Awakening. For four little girls.  
The Rebuke Proper. For 3 gentlemen and 2 ladies.  
Exorcising an Evil Spirit. For six ladies.  
Both Sides of the Fence. For four males.  
The Spirits of the Wood. For two troupes of girls.  
No Room for the Drone. For three little boys.  
Arm-chair. For numerous characters.  
Measure for Measure. For four girls.  
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98 William Street, New York.